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Introduction

Foreword

“Why, in heavens name, am I doing this?”

That question passed through my mind about a thousand times during our hike retracing (as best we could) the 1847-47 Mormon Battalion’s “main route” from Iowa to California.

Preparations

Sunday, March 4th, 2007

Dear Gentle Reader;

This Trek is being made just for fun because my Scouts got me involved in “living history.” Going the entire 2,000 miles will be challenging, but I trust something worthwhile will come of it. We hope to share the experience with you in a meaningful way through this modern journal.

The invitation for others to participate is due to requests by descendants and others with an interest in this unique historic group. How could I say no? Consequently, Trek Membership Dues are necessary to meet government land use requirements and to cover basic costs. All funds remaining in the Trek kitty will be donated to Not-for-Profit entities with ties to the historic trails we will follow.

I’m learning a lot since 1840’s history is new to me. The 60’s were my generation (grin). If, in my musings, you note a mistake about something you know to be different, please send your kind comment to me. If appropriate, a correction or retraction will be made as time permits.

The essence of appreciating “living history” is to recognize there are always at least two viewpoints about what actually happened, its cause and its importance. It is from each other that we can learn and put our common history into perspective.

“Sincere appreciation” is not sufficient to express the depth of gratitude which is due Phoebe (aka Denny, my wife), my family, Doug Cloward - who gave me a love for outdoor education, our web developers, those who contributed their scholarship or encouragement and to everyone who has or will yet help with this Trek.

And finally, to “my” Scouts, to our young women who are their equal in every respect and to the families that started the ball rolling: The Battalion Trek 2008 is dedicated to you and to those original 1846 Battalion members whom we represent, “in honorable remembrance.”

Your Obedient Servant -
Ebenezer Brown, Sgt., Co. A
Aka – Kevin (Bud) Henson
Midland, Michigan 2007

Update - March Fourth 2008

Wednesday, March 5th, 2008

Dear Gentle Reader:

We are now just four months from “Marching Forth” along the Battalion’s trail. And, in one year from today, the 2008 Trek will be over and have become another part of Battalion history.

When Captain James Allen rode into Mount Pisgah in 1846, he asked for 500 volunteers to serve just one year. Just one year and 2,000 miles later, history had been made that still reverberates today.

A rhetorical question: If the Battalion were being formed today, would you be willing to volunteer? Would the call have to come from the highest authority or would you volunteer on your own?

In that same vein, may we ask that you consider helping us by volunteering to arrange a Trek campsite? It's not as hard as standing out in the cold during the Olympics. It's not as dangerous as going on a Scout white water raft trip. And it's *NOWHERE* as taxing as being a youth conference chaperone.

All you'd have to do is make some phone calls, ask some questions and get back to us with the answers. We provide the information you need to make the contacts and get the information we need. Probably take less than four or five hours total. Please consider it and e-mail us at Volunteer@battaliontrek.com.

OK. It's time for an Trek status update. We will begin posting updates weekly or more frequently.

- General Status – We're doing very well on our preparations. Lots of details left, but things are coming along fairly well.
- Schedule – our up-to-date plans are posted to website's "Trek Schedule" page.
- Special events – planning is underway all along the route. There will soon be a new "Event Calendar" page that gives you details about the day and special events. Council Bluffs and Fort Leavenworth get us started in style.
- Route, vehicles – a road route is completed and being provided to Route Scout volunteers.
- Route, hiking – mostly completed except for regions where we are still negotiating for permission to hike across private lands. The permit process for public lands (BLM, state, etc.) is underway and we do not expect any significant problems for those sections.
- Registration – on the website, we are completing the registration module and will have it activated mid-March.
- Tax-exempt status – we have received our "not-for-profit" designation from the IRS. Documentation for contributions will be provided.

Well, that is my report from wilds of Michigan where the sun is starting to warm things and we hope for spring quite soon. If you have any inquiries, please post them and I will respond.

Dear Reader, I remain, Your Obedient Servant,

Ebenezer Brown, 2nd Sgt., Co. A
(aka Kevin "Bud" Henson)
Midland, MI – March 4, 2008

July 2008

[July 1, 2008 - Driving Miss Denny](#)

We're off! After two years of planning, we're finally starting on our way.

At 7 AM this morning, we (wife Denny, father-in-law Jerry and your reporter) finished loading the last of the gear into the truck and RV, then we headed out from Michigan for points west.

Our goal today was to reach Nauvoo, Illinois which is about 12 hours driving time. And we happily report there was room at the Nauvoo State Park where we set up camp about sundown.

[Wednesday, July 2, 2008 – Nauvoo, Illinois](#)

Our day today was spent attending to last minute e-mails, arranging materials and conducting some research locally.

The Nauvoo Legion seems a good topic as some of its leaders became leaders in the Battalion's story. The Legion was typical of local militias. Unit leaders up to the rank of Colonel were elected from amongst the prominent community members. Militias were very "democratic" entities and not subject to the same standards as the federal Army.

There was not a common uniform that everyone wore. The only common item was a red sash waistband. Perhaps that's why the modern Mormon Battalion uniform utilizes a red sash?

Another possible line of research for someone to follow: How many and which of the Battalion members had served in the Legion? What were their respective ranks?

Anyway, I was seeking more insights into the on-going conflicts between the Army and Battalion members. Hopefully Sherman Fleek will expand on this theme at our seminar Fort Leavenworth on August 9.

[Thursday, July 3, 2008 – Travel day to Mt. Pisgah, Iowa](#)

We pulled out of Nauvoo this morning after filling some of our water tanks. For the next ten days we will be in rural Iowa and think it best to have a modest supply in case we don't meet up with our expected sources.

Using Gregory's Franzwa's recently released book, "The Mormon Trail Revisited" (Patrice Press), we traced some of the eastern Iowa portions of the Trail today. It's important to understand the trail leading to Mt. Pisgah and Council Bluffs in order to understand the origins of the Battalion.

For a few minutes, we stood on the western shore of the Mississippi River opposite Nauvoo, looking back at the scene the Pioneers had in February 1846 – without the snow of course. But this morning was gray and except for the green trees and nearly flood stage river, the view probably hasn't changed

much. The temple stands magnificent on the bluffs, a faithful echo of its' earlier predecessor. The town of Nauvoo truly is a "beautiful place."

A few miles further west, following Gregory's directions, we poked around off the main road and found the Sugar Creek campsite. It must have been a sight with all the wagons and tents surrounded by snow and mud. Twenty degrees below zero temperatures were reportedly experienced by the advance party. We had a balmy 70 degrees as we motored along at 55 miles per hour. The Pioneers were fortunate to do more than eight miles per day.

By four PM we pulled into the area of Mt. Pisgah. It isn't a town these days. It's marked only by a small cemetery, a few historic plaques, and a small county park. It's a peaceful place, far enough from the highways that you don't hear traffic. Not many airplanes either, so it's very quiet.

Bob Brown and his family own about 1,500 acres surrounding the park. Bob has spent years helping research the Mormon Trail in Union County. He's a wonderful host to us and permitted us an area to camp as we complete our preparations.

We're pretty much ready to start, but we still have to set up the portable toilet, mark some of the equipment and rearrange stuff that's been thrown around inside the truck while on the back roads.

Tomorrow evening, I shall change into my pioneer garb, step back in time and officially begin the Trek.

[Friday, July 4, 2008 – Mt. Pisgah, Iowa](#)

Some of "my" Scouts arrived at camp today. Three of the six young men who started our Mormon Battalion reenactor's group drove over to join us for the first day's hike.

Also along is my Scout file leader, Valiant Jones – a man aptly named. Val can scrounge equipment like no other and he manages to keep me in line as I work with the 11-year-old patrol scouts.

A few years ago, Val saw the importance of having our young men march with "muskets" in our reenacting events, something I'd missed. They sharpened up and acted even better than their usual exemplary behavior.

Alyson, Val's oldest daughter will accompany us for a month as she prepares to begin her masters' program in American Studies. Allyson will learn about reenacting and hopefully help us put some perspective into women's lives.

Late in the afternoon we were joined in camp by the Reynolds family from Des Moines. They participated in the wagon train back in '97 and had some good advice for us novices.

After a tasty Dutch oven meal, we packed up the last of the equipment, then headed to bed. Oh, and our young men provided our group with fireworks display to finally celebrate Independence Day. And, in that spirit, I've always been impressed by the following verse of "America the Beautiful."

*O beautiful for heroes proved
In liberating strife.*

*Who more than self their country loved
And mercy more than life!
America! America!
May God thy gold refine
Till all success be nobleness
And every gain divine!*

Saturday, July 5, 2008 – Creston, Iowa

We were up at sunrise – and a beautiful sunrise it was. We had a quick breakfast, struck the large tent and without much ceremony, started the Trek. Passing his home, we bade Bob Brown goodbye and headed westward along 170th Street. We crossed the Grand River in the first mile, the same Grand River that flows through the valley of Adam-Ondi-Ahman down in Missouri.

Coming UP out of the Grand River valley was almost enough to make me reconsider the Trek. That's a TALL HILL! It's got to be every bit of 100 feet higher than the river bottoms! Nothing like that at home.

The spring floods here in Iowa had washed out another bridge, creating some confusion for our drivers moving the support vehicles but they managed to work around the detours and incorrect maps.

We hiked six miles (2 hours), rested about a half-hour and completed the morning hike just after noon. Following the old Army practice, we took a long lunch and rested before completing our day's hike about 5 PM.

Mulberries! The roadsides are planted with mulberry trees and its been a GREAT YEAR for the mulberries. Sweet! Almost every tree we passed we stopped to munch on a few. Our hands and lips were quite stained. Maybe I shall gather enough for a pie and ask Phoebe to help me make one.

We're camped in a flood plain where just three weeks ago stood a few feet of water. But it's dried out now and Richard Byerly is our host for the weekend. He's a retired state legislator, college president, teacher, coach, horseman, and a few other things we didn't get written down.

Sunday, July 6, 2008 – Creston, Iowa

It's Sunday and we're "laying over" today to rest. You may ask why are we laying over after just ONE day. Well, in my planning I thought it might be a good idea to put a rest in immediately after the first day of hiking to let blisters subside, sunburns to abate somewhat and rest our weary bones if not adequately in shape. Good Plan!

While "tuning up" for the Trek, I hiked over 100 miles breaking in my new shoes and getting stronger legs. Nary a blister in that whole time. First day of the Trek and what do I have? Two small but tender blisters – one on each big toe's callus. How's that for ironic?

My guess is that it's due to walking on hilly graveled roads rather than the flat roads in Michigan. The ups and downs force your foot into the shoe differently while the gravel makes you push off the toes differently. For whatever reason, the outside of the big toes got a little more work and are complaining.

Valiant Jones and the young men left this morning, headed back to Michigan. Now it's just the four of us in the core group for a while – myself, Denny, Jerry Watts (Denny's dad) and Allyson Jones. We're doing some reading, journal writing, speaking with family by phone, which is very different than 1846.

And, just to explain the odd posting on the Blog. Since we aren't in a routine yet, compounded by the fact that we don't always have broadband internet connectivity, we will post as often as we can but sometimes it won't be a daily posting. Come back often to visit though and we hope to have some photos up soon.

YOS –

Kevin Henson

Aka "Ebenezer Brown"

[Monday, July 7, 2008 – Mormon Trail County Park, Iowa](#)

Today was probably more typical of how I hope the Trek will go. I got up before sunrise, grabbed some quick chow, broke camp, loaded my gear into the support "wagon" truck, then started hiking to get as much in as possible before it got hot. It's a pleasant time hiking early in the day.

We had a severe thunderstorm this evening after we got to camp at the "Morman Lake" county park. The RV was connected to local power when the circuits got hit by lightning. Now everything is acting up and we're concerned we have major damage to the electrical systems onboard.

In the morning we'll send Denny and Jerry into Council Bluffs to see if we can get the RV straightened out.

[Tuesday, July 8, 2008 – Cold Springs County Park, Lewis, Iowa](#)

Today was probably LESS typical of how the Trek will go – at least I sure hope so.

Jerry and Denny drug the RV over to Council Bluffs and wheedled the service manager to take on our "emergency" project. They got it half done – power to the AC, lights in half the unit and the fridge is running – but still not very cool. Hummmm.

For Allyson and I, we had an early start like yesterday and made good time. She drove the support truck while I hiked. It wasn't too hot, the breeze was helpful and an all-round pleasant day to hike. If only we had only to hike.

WARNING! SPOILER STORIES FOLLOW!

For those of you who want to hold me in high regard for the entire Trek, you need to skip the remainder of this blog post.

Battle of the Cows (Almost)

OK, I admit a particularly fond place in my heart for Gary Larson's "Far Side" cartoons, especially any dealing with cows.

Iowa has lots of cows – LOTS! And, without much to entertain myself with while walking (no, I'm not using a "pod" music player) I find that I sometimes amuse myself by talking to the animals. See – I warned you that reading this would destroy your high opinion of me.

Specifically, I like to imitate bird calls in hopes of getting a response and "mooring" at the cows. A regular Doctor Doolittle, I am.

So, about 10 AM while walking along, I start "mooring" at a herd of cows on a hillside.

Now, cows are naturally curious beasts, and the entire herd all turn to look at me – even the calves.

The whole herd starts slowly advancing towards this two-legged faux-cow who is obviously full of bull.

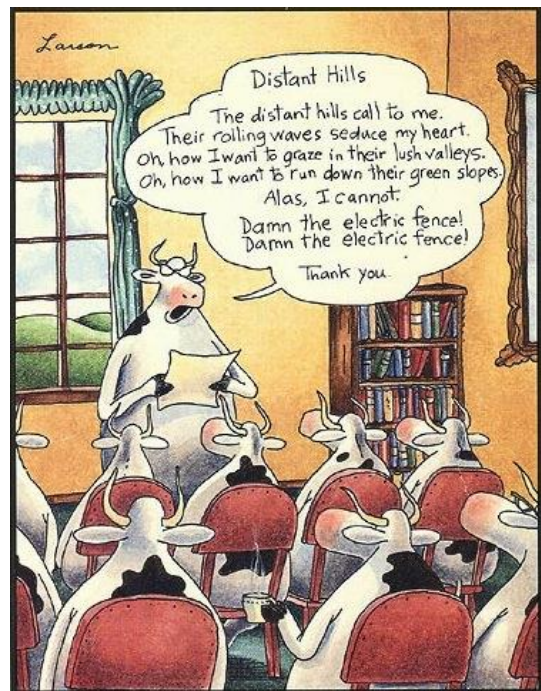
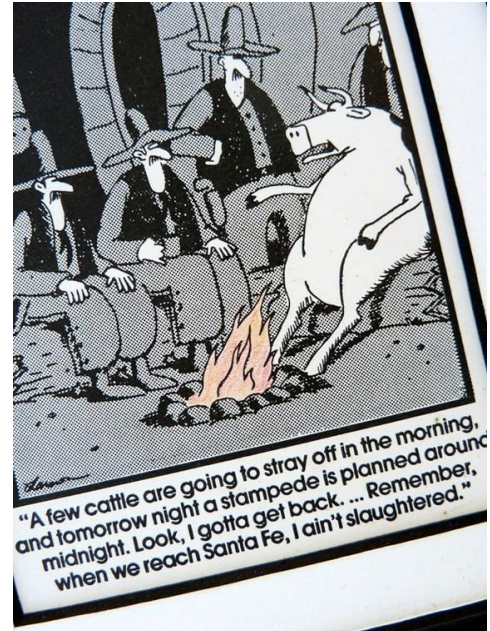
Thoroughly enjoying the novelty of having someone/something pay attention to me and being oblivious to the impending confrontation, I "moo" some more. Out of the herd, about six particularly large cows take the lead in checking me out.

Delighted at the obvious "connection" I've made with my bovine cousins (and being not too bright), I "moo" one more time and then the LARGEST cow takes a 50 yard long, full blown charge towards me and ONLY the itty-bitty, teeny-weenie, yellow insulator electric fence twenty-five feet away stops the Big Bad Momma Cow from making a hamburger of me.

May I report that I had an epiphany of how Lt. Frost felt during the 1846 Battle of the Bulls – only I didn't have a loaded .69 musket with which to defend myself.

How Mean Is That Doggie In the Window?

Having been a missionary, I know the importance of staying on the good side of barking dogs – especially ones that still retain their teeth.



Cow poetry

So, in the early afternoon a LARGE “chow-chow” looking rust colored dog decides it’s HIS road and I’m NOT entitled to walk past HIS territory – even if I’ve taken the precaution of moving to the far side of the road. After the Almost Battle of the Cows, I decided to be circumspect and avoid a confrontation; so, no, I didn’t bark at the dog.

The chow-dog charges anyway, however this time there isn’t even an itty-bitty “invisible fence” kind of thing to stop Chowie from becoming Chewie. I keep facing him without looking him in the eyes (some say that’s a direct challenge and only aggravates the animal) and carefully pull out our 2-miler walkie-talkie.

Allyson, bless her heart, answers quickly and comes charging with the support truck/trailer, gunning it in between Chowie and your humbled servant.

Performing a Harrison Ford style jump onto a moving vehicle (Scouts – don’t try this at home OR scout camp), I grab hold of the outhouse, then blow a raspberry at Chowie as we leave him in a cloud of Iowa dust.

Thanks Allyson for saving my bacon.

Of course, that quarter mile wasn’t actually hiked, but please don’t ask me to go back and challenge Chowie for the honor of doing so.

Iowa Mud Bloggin’

Did I mention Allyson was driving the support truck/trailer combo for the first time today? No? Well, it’s true. Despite all her pleading and weeping, we explained that since Denny had to go help get the RV fixed, Allyson was the ONLY person available to drive the support truck/trailer combo.

She did fine, I’m happy to report. Really. No tree branches impaled into the box truck. The port-a-potty contents didn’t slosh out of the tank. Nothing thrown from the shelves. Perfect driving for a first-time combo driver.

To fully appreciate today’s entry, you need to know that Iowa county roads are divided into three general classes. First – concrete or asphalt hard surface, all weather roads. Second – gravel or limestone covered roads that are generally passable in all weather. Third – dirt roads marked with the sign “Class B Service Road – Proceed At Your Own Risk” – and they mean that. Really.

During the day I’d had to hike down a couple of those Class B roads. Yesterday evening’s rain had fairly well dried up and the roads were good enough for the truck to follow along. No problems.

About 4 PM, I finish the day’s 19 miles and I jumped into the truck with Allyson and we started following tomorrow’s route to check it out on our way to camp. That is, until we get to a downhill “T” intersection, BOTH sides of which are Class B roads (remember, “Enter At Your Own Risk”?) and both going uphill with a slight angle on the road surface.

So, I have Allyson turn right onto the shorter hill and we get all of 50 feet past the intersection when the road turns to Iowa gumbo mud. THIS area had been blessed by a shower earlier in the afternoon and the top two inches were pretty slick.

It's obvious we are NOT going UP the hill, so I take the drivers seat and attempt a delicate backing job – to no avail. The trailer is stuck in the right ruts and the front cab wheels drift down slope into the left ruts - leading to a beautiful, jack-knifed configuration of our little combo unit forming a nice “V” across the entire width of the muddy road.

At 4:30 PM I start hiking out (with 20 pounds of Iowa gumbo mud on my shoes) to the nearest farmhouse about half a mile away. Nobody home and since it's at least another mile and a half to the NEXT farmhouse, I decide to wait a little past 5 PM in case they get home soon after work.

To add insult to injury, a thunderstorm blows up with HARD rain lasting 20 minutes, right where poor Allyson is sitting alone in the truck. Allyson's CB radio goes dead and of course, we're so far out in rural Iowa that my cell phone doesn't work to inform Denny & Jerry what's going on. I have visions of Allyson, the truck and trailer sinking out of sight into the deepening mud.

After the weather calms down (about 5:45) and deciding the house I was at wasn't going to see its owner anytime soon, I hike to the next visible home. Mrs. Erickson calls her son Rex who drives over and asks if his “little tractor” will be able to pull us out.

Being a “city kid” I offer the opinion that bigger will probably be better in our case. He takes the hint and goes home to get his “big tractor.” When he comes back, it is a BIG, blue, eight-wheeled, independently steered front/rear wheel tractor.

Even with that beast, it still took 45 minutes to extract us from the mire. Rex had to pull us downhill past the “T” intersection, pull us around the right-hand turn, then uphill onto the limestone road about 100 yards while we're throwing mud off the tires.

There's mud all over, under and in the truck – on the steering wheel, pedals, seat and all the controls I had to touch. What a hoot! But all's well that ends well and we're all safely at Cold Springs county park for the night – laughing. Really.

[Wednesday, July 9, 2008 – Atlantic, Iowa](#)

Today was (hopefully) NOT typical of how the Trek will go. Because the past two days have challenged our equipment, I decided to use my “Mulligan” (golfers will understand the term) and not hike. Yep, I “rode the sick wagon” even though I wasn't sick.

We spent the day working on the RV (again), doing wash, and conducting mud removal from the truck.

The locals advised us to take the unit to “The Car Guys” in Atlantic, Iowa. Not a name to instill confidence that they can do RV work, but we have to tell you, these folks know their stuff. They worked

quickly and effectively in repairing some water problems in addition to the electrical issues. Not to mention, their rates are less than Council Bluffs.

In the evening, we're camped at Cold Springs County Park in Lewis, Iowa. A number of trails pass through or near Lewis; the Iowa Dragoon Military Trail, the Mormon Pioneer, the Mormon Handcart as well as early railroad and stagecoach routes. The local historical society is working to restore an early home that served as the ferry house for the Nishnabotna River. The handcarts walked right by this building. Valda Kennedy, her husband Bob and Dana Kunze spent a couple hours sharing early Lewis history with us.

The Hitchcock House is another draw. It was a slave refuge on the "Underground Railway" pre-Civil War. Check out Lewis.

[Thursday, July 10, 2008 – Macedonia Old Town Park, Macedonia, Iowa](#)

Got going a little slow this morning, but completed the full mileage for the day – another 19 day. But let me tell you, it was HOT and HUMID. To cool off, I dumped water on my shirt and head, but because of the high humidity, it didn't evaporate for a couple hours. The breeze helps cool me off somewhat.

Denny shotgunned, driving the support truck. Allyson refuses to drive. There were a couple more of the Class B roads today for me to hike down, but we have a new Official Trek Policy & Procedure which reads, "Thou Shalt Not Drive the Trucks On Class B Iowa Roads." Denny did an end run around those sections.

As I was walking a mile section of Class B mud, I noticed a rust stain. Kicking at it, I scared up a metal fragment that looked old. Since I was very close to the original Mormon Trail, it kind of excited me a tad. Walking a little further, I found about eight rusted metal fragments, two appearing to be wagon wheel tire irons and one a bridle ring. What got me even more excited was finding a piece of "clinker" – evidence of blacksmithing since there's nothing else like it in the area.

DISCLAIMER – these fragments had been washed downslope along a modern dirt road, so their historical relationships had already been disturbed, but I did NOT remove them from the area. There was also a low probability that they really belonged to the Pioneers, but it was possible, so I did not remove them. One should NEVER remove possible historic artifacts from an area. It's OUR history – not YOURS.

About a mile further on, Rich Cody, a local that raises cows for a living came up on his ATV. I did not mention my prior experience with Iowa cows.

Cody is an enthusiastic person – hearty laugh, quick to joke with you and a big-hearted guy. All three of Cody's sons have played arena football. Quite interested in our project and we left him with a brochure explaining the Trek. Maybe he'll come see us in Council Bluffs at month end.

When I mentioned the metal fragments, Cody explained that they were most likely from the farm of a couple brothers who had died a couple decades earlier. They were reclusive and did everything "old

style” even to blacksmithing their wagon. Hardly ever went to town. So, little mystery solved and we didn’t disturb any historic materials.

We’re spending tonight at Macedonia, a town founded by LDS pioneers but which did not exist at the time the Battalion was formed. It’s on a branch of the Nishabotna River, so it was a potential stopping point for those rushing to get to Council Bluffs for the enlistment.

There have been zillions of lightning bugs this week. We haven’t been able to get it on video properly. It’s a child’s delight.

[Friday, July 11, 2008 – Manawa State Park, Council Bluffs, Iowa](#)

It’s another beautiful day. A tad more dry than yesterday morning but only a shade cooler.

We’ve made the executive decision to move camp to Council Bluffs for tonight instead of remaining at Macedonia where there aren’t any services to help with the RV diagnoses and fixes. Denny & I will run ahead in the support truck to try and reserve a campsite.

When we arrived at Manawa SP about 4 PM, there were, predictably for a Friday afternoon in the summer, no electrical sites remaining, but the WONDERFUL staff at Manawa put us up at our Youth Site a couple days early and helped in other non-traditional ways.

This area got hit by 100+ mph winds recently that really tore up the park and surrounding region. Lots of trees down, power out, local flooding, etc. But despite the mayhem and additional pressures on them, the Park staff has been patient, helpful and accommodating. It isn’t quite like Yellowstone in terms of natural beauty, but on a really hot day, Lake Manawa is quite refreshing and the people make it simply wonderful. Kudos to Iowa DNR and State Parks staff. Did I mention that they are wonderful?

As we were discussing options with the staff, a gentleman on his bike stopped to listen and offer some alternative camp possibilities. He’s from the Macedonia area and is engaged to be married this fall. Nice guy. He and his bride to be stopped by later after we were in camp. He asked the usual questions but we were so behind in setup that I committed to a presentation on Saturday evening if they’d like to stop by then. So, we have our first impromptu presentation set.

After placing the RV and putting up the tents, we grabbed some victuals from a national outlet food/everything store. Oh, and Dad treated us to a ... well, a “cool treat” of ice cream at his favorite national outlet.

As we prepare for bed, there are two massive thunderstorms off in the distance; one to the north, the other to the southwest. The north one is up near where the tornado killed the four Scouts a few weeks ago. It’s popping off BIG bolts of lightning that play from cloud-to-cloud and back light the storm. It’s quite a show but as pretty as it is and as much as I like to watch thunderstorms, I need the rest more – so it’s off to bed.

[Saturday, July 12, 2008 – Manawa SP, Council Bluffs, Iowa](#)

Between the high humidity, strong winds, lightning and BIG raindrops, none of us slept very well last night. In fact, I didn't sleep much at all. And, I wanted to get up early (before 5 AM) to hike while it's cool. And, cool it is – in the low 60's and overcast with a fairly brisk wind from the northwest.

Denny and I backtracked to Macedonia via the support truck. It continued to rain some this morning, so I broke out the oilcloth, cut a piece to length and wore it for about 30 minutes as I hiked (anytime I write "hike", "hiked", "hiking" or any derivative thereof, you should insert "up and down hills" before it).

This morning, I was able to complete 12 miles by lunchtime, which almost gets us back on schedule, leaving only another 11 miles to hike into Council Bluffs during the next week sometime. The others worked on getting the remaining RV's problems figured out. Final repairs next week?

Late in the day, we drove over to Omaha and stopped by the Winter Quarters' Visitor Center. Took the tour and met some of the staff. Wonderful folks.

Allyson was on guard looking to spot her brother Bradley, a missionary currently serving in Omaha. Seems everyone knows "Elder Jones" but he isn't anywhere to be seen today.

A family we know in Michigan stopped by for a quick visit. They were on their way to Salt Lake City, knew we were supposed to be here and managed to find us at the campsite. Turns out that Jim Krueger had lived in Lewis where we were two days earlier. And that older engaged couple I mentioned? They stopped by again - and small world - Jim had known their kids and been Best Man at one sons' wedding. They all had a good time catching up with each other.

See, there are all kinds of connections.

[Sunday, July 13, 2008 – Council Bluffs, Iowa](#)

Today, being a Sunday is a layover day. The others have decided we will attend an 11 AM church service, allowing for a little more sleep in the morning. Breakfast was a quick affair as we all need showers before church.

We attended Kaneshville Ward at their new Stake Center – located not far from the location where the Battalion mustered into service back in 1846.

In the meanwhile, I'm writing family letters, trying to catch up the blog, transferring photos and other related items. More later in the week.

[Monday thru Wednesday, July 14 – 16, 2008 – Council Bluffs, Iowa](#)

Don't hate me because I'm busy.

When I developed the schedule for Trek, I put in a week of non-travel days here at Council Bluffs. Some people asked me what I intended to do – just laze around wasting time?

Far from it.

Having worked with traveling camps before, I knew that the Trek startup would be fraught with problems large and small that would take time to fix. The RV problems are a good example. We spent the entire forepart of this week conducting fault diagnosis of our various problems, then fixing them.

We also needed to coordinate the special events of next week (July 25-27) and wanted to check out the preparations for that. The Western Trails Center is a very nice museum but more about that next week.

The Council Bluffs/Kanesville area is sponsoring a local event called "Come Home to Kanesville" which keys on the early history of the area. Very nice effort by the local folks to emphasize genealogy, history and connections. It's been estimated that there are over 100,000 Battalion descendants still in the Omaha metro area, so we're in the right place to start. We had hoped to spend some time visiting with them, but our RV issues kept us from doing so.

Despite being within sight of downtown Omaha Nebraska (yep, we can actually see the skyscrapers from Lake Manawa State Park where we're camped), our T-"Moobile" cell phone and Verizon broadband connections are not very good. Hey guys... can you hear me now?

So, we're still playing catchup with the blog and daily updates. We'll keep trying though.

YOS -

Kevin (Ebenezer Brown) Henson
From the Shores of Lake Manawa

[Thursday, July 17, 2008 – Council Bluffs, Iowa](#)

Another reason for spending some non-hiking days in the area is to conduct some research with local historians.

Today we're joined by Peter Guilbert of California. He will be with us until Saturday afternoon. Peter is a descendant and reenactor out near the Coloma gold fields. Nice guy. More about him soon.

We borrowed Gail Holmes for three hours this morning. Gail is turning 85 next week and has spent over 30 years researching various aspects of early LDS history in the greater Omaha/Council Bluffs/Kanesville/Winter Quarters area. The man is a walking fountain of knowledge and it's an honor to have him spend his time answering basic questions we could probably find on our own, but which he is capable of adding more depth, helping us make connections we couldn't on our own. For example:

We motored up to the area of "Redemption Hill" also called Pratt-Taylor Hill. This is/was a flat topped hill west of Mosquito Creek where Brigham Young and the church leaders set up their camp in mid-June 1846. The area has changed much due to erosion and construction so it doesn't look much like it did long ago.

As we're talking about the area, I ask Gail if we can drive closer and he directs us to the home of a gentleman who's lived there since 1934. We start discussing "how do we know" this is the right place. Gail casually mentions that a large flag pole was put up in front of Bro. Brigham's tent so people could

tell right off where to go if they needed to see him. That kind of excited me because in the Tom Perry collection at BYU is a sketch by Thomas Kane of "The Enlisting Camp of the Mormons – July 14, 1846."

Kane's pencil sketch seems to show a camp with a tall flagpole in front of some tents. So, I casually mention the sketch and Gail gets all excited because he's NEVER seen this drawing. So, Gail gets an e-mail from me with the sketch as an attachment.

Then it's both our turn to be astounded. The property owner casually mentions some "old bridge" pilings across Mosquito Creek that he and his siblings discovered when they were kids. Gail and I do a double take suspecting just which bridge this is. We pose a couple more questions to see if this might be the location of the bridge connecting Redemption Hill with the rest of the Grand Encampment. You see, the exact location of this bridge hasn't been identified yet, so we're pretty excited that we've finally got it pinned down to within a hundred yards or so. A little archeology work is in order at this farm.

We head over to the Iowa School for the Deaf where there's a nice plaque commemorating the enlistment of the Battalion. Gail admits that the school grounds are the "convenient" place for the public to access the marker and isn't necessarily the actual location of the enlistment. "In fact", he says, "they were actually sworn into the Army down at Trader's Point."

So, Peter and I decide to start the "official" Trek route at the south bank of the Missouri River closest to the "soldier's camp" just east of where Peter Sarpy's trading post stood in 1846.

Finally, on Thursday evening we take a couple hours to head over to the Winter Quarters Temple. There are really nicely conceived and well executed stained glass pieces around the temple and it's well worth your time to check them out if you're at the building.

As we sat in the waiting room before our session, I noted a painting of Winter Quarters portraying the winter of 1847. There are visual representations of many historic sites and events. The warm yellow light depicted as shining out the window or door of nearly every sod dugout home or log cabin seems to pierce the gloom of winter and death prevalent in the painting. I've read many accounts of Winter Quarters, but "seeing" it through the artist's eyes lent a new interpretation to the reality of the story.

[Friday, July 18, 2008 – Council Bluffs, Iowa](#)

Our time here is almost over. The tents are struck. We're packed. The horses are fed (gasoline) and we're ready for a new phase of the Trek. We're headed to Fort Leavenworth tomorrow.

[Saturday, July 19, 2008 – Glenwood, Iowa](#)

Apparently, Peter didn't sleep much last night. Despite the two hours' time zone difference between California and Iowa, he was early for our 5 AM start (3 AM his time). We finished breaking the RV down to travel, piled into the truck and headed south to the Missouri riverbanks.

It was foggy this morning – very thick and that helped keep the sun at bay until nearly 11 AM. Though it was still very humid there was a slight breeze that helped us keep cool.

Peter is a retired state firefighter with 30 years' experience. He's skilled with a lot of the skills we need on Trek (safety, emergency) and can tell some pretty good stories about work. He's also a reenactor with the Sacramento area groups. They do the Gold Rush bash at Coloma and last year conducted more than 50 events to commemorate the Battalion. Hat's off for keeping the Battalion "in honorable remembrance."

We complete our 15 mile day shortly after noon at Glenwood City Park. Nice place and the historical society buildings are nearby. We were going to go see the museum, but I got distracted and forgot. You see, as Peter and I walk into camp, we turn a corner and see our parked RV – except something is somehow very different about it.

All across the back (stern) of the trailer, there was water sheeting off at the floor level. Not dripping quickly mind you. Sheeting. Like Niagara Falls sheeting – only not quite so much water – but a pretty fair approximation of Niagara which I've seen a few times in person.

One's mind does strange things when presented with a sight that is incomprehensible – which this was. Literally, I could not comprehend that there was an Iowa flood coming out of my RV. It just wasn't something I expected to see, so it took about 15 seconds to decide I wasn't hallucinating.

Back to Council Bluffs for parts and we soon have the pipes replaced, repacked, reconnected and we can shower for Sunday. The only major system now that hasn't frizzed out is the heater. I can hardly wait to try it out.

[Sunday, July 20, 2008 – Glenwood, Iowa](#)

It's a layover day again on Sunday. We can shower (hooray!) now that the flood waters have subsided. We head to church at Glenwood and meet some good folks.

All afternoon is spent catching up on correspondence, writing and phoning family. OK, I slept for a couple hours as well, then slipped over to the Mills County Historical Museum at Glenwood. I was looking for old road maps of the area, but 1875 is the best they could provide and I already have that map. Maybe next time.

Did I mention that it seems we all have a weakness for the best-selling chocolate sandwich cookie with the white sugar filling? Especially, if we can dunk them in milk. But, I shall not divulge the name of who has the sweetest tooth amongst our core group.

A couple other things I'd like to discuss with blog readers:

1 – My writing style is inconsistent, and I know it. I slip back and forth from present to past tense without much regard for proper style. I hope it isn't too disturbing to you, Dear Reader.

2 – Blog posts may come in batches since our connectivity is sporadic. Be patient.

[Monday, July 21, 2008 – Bartlett, Iowa](#)

Dear Friends:

Tough start this morning. I got up on the wrong side of the bed and was – I admit – a VERY grumpy gus. To add to my foul mood, I lost the GPS unit. Dang!

Then I got a mood lift. Sherman Fleek, author and military historian, calls to congratulate our start and to wish us well. He updated me on his many projects, and we chatted for about 30 minutes. It helped pass the time and before we ring off, I'm feeling much better about life.

If you haven't read Sherman's book, "History May Be Searched In Vain: A Military History of the Mormon Battalion" – you should. Puts many issues into the light of a military unit and explains why many of the problems occurred. Four-star read for Battalion buffs.

The 18 miles pass quickly and I'm in camp at 4 PM.

Did I mention that the water pump in the trailer didn't work after we left Glenwood? When I arrived at camp Lake Forney, the first thing was to crawl into the bowels of the RV (Really Vexatious) camper to see what's wrong with the pump. Loose wire. Easy fix. Hooray!

In the evening, we're joined by Holly and Chris Hansen with her mother, Clara. They're on a family history tour along the route her ancestors took with the Battalion. She's related to the Schupe brothers of Company C. They were detached with the family detachment and wintered over in Pueblo, Colorado. Brother Andrew Jackson Schupe's journal has been transcribed and Holly was kind enough to provide a copy. Hopefully it will shed more light on the Pueblo and Sick Detachment's movements. The family donated it back in 2000 but it hasn't been reviewed by many people yet.

Even more fun, Holly is being interviewed and photographed by the Hallmark magazine for a "family heritage" series. Our camp was photographed by Frank and Josh who accompanied the Hansen's today around the Council Bluffs region. We had "Sufferin' Succotash", our camp specialty. Denny and Allyson made rolls in the dutch oven while Jerry contributed some honey butter. Green beans, chicken and potatoes rounded out the menu. Everyone enjoyed the time together and sharing insights and history.

Hopefully the Hallmark article will do it justice. The other parts of the Hallmark series will deal with Japanese interments during the Second World War, the Underground Railroad and Ellis Island. To have the Battalion story included in this series is quite a responsibility to help tell the story correctly and how it fits Holly's family today.

Well, it's nearly midnight. I still need a shower and then I'll crawl into bed.

[Tuesday, July 22, 2008 – Wabonsie State Park, IA](#)

We started later than usual this morning – about 8 AM because we were up so late last night at the Forney Lake camp. The original road seems to be following the base of the bluffs and the hike today is easier with slightly lower humidity. Last night's rains in the area (but not on us) seems to have helped cool it down some.

Because the road is hugging the base of the eastern bluffs, there is blessed shade until late morning, a welcome relief from the strong sun.

At least two or three white-tailed deer in the fields scare up each day and not a day goes by without at least a couple of red-tailed hawks. They sit in the trees and screech as I approach, but they usually spook and fly before I can get close enough to get a good picture.

Wabonsie State Park is up in the bluffs, so when I complete the planned distance for today (16.2 miles), Denny picks me up and we drive back to the road and go up in the hills to camp.

Sweet Blessed Relief! They have a hot shower in the campgrounds and folks, believe me, I take full advantage of the facility. Quiet place, Wabonise. Just a few campers here. We all sleep well.

LIVE GPS TRACKING INFORMATION

If you want to follow our progress via GPS on the Internet, go to:

<http://share.findmespot.com/shared/gogl.jsp?gllid=0zJDBXvP1hEG09MieWMxdITT2Jepg4Npp>

A few comments:

1 – The site updates about every 10 minutes while we're hiking and RESETS every 24 hours – meaning that if we aren't hiking (like on Sunday's) the trail will start falling off.

2 – We've found the satellite hookups are not very reliable. Sometimes we update every 10 minutes the way the company says it will; sometimes it goes for an hour or more without making a contact – so be patient.

3 – The program "connects the dots" leading one to believe I cross fields and properties which I don't without permission. At this time, I mostly following North, South, East and West roads. All the diagonals are misperceptions because of how the display works.

Enjoy!

YHS -

Bud / Kevin Henson

[Wednesday, July 23, 2008 – Linden, MO](#)

Today I started early again, getting in a good six miles before Denny and I stopped in the town of Hamburg for ... sausage and eggs. Just before reaching town the modern Bluff Road is rather high off the flats and just below to the west is a double line of trees with very old homes facing each other between the trees. My suspicion is that is pretty much original Bluff Road that the Battalion walked along.

At the "Yack n Snak" we grab breakfast, rest my feet and check out the old photographs of the area. There were some really big floods in Hamburg and I learn that the Missouri River typically flooded in June. At first I thought that was kind of odd, indicating a slow run off from the spring melt, but then I

realized it was from the spring rains and storms common to the mid-west. Michigan snows really skew one's mind set.

We had our first stop by local law enforcement (with backup) today. For details, read our book if we publish one.

Won't bore you with the details of the route, but we finish hiking at the former site of the town of Linden. It was the original county seat in 1846, but eventually fell into disfavor being too close to the Iowa state line and pretty much disappeared – except for the cemetery and a small community church.

Our hosts tonight are Ken and Donna-Lee Lucas. Turns out they are both from “old” families in the area with roots as deep as the prairie grass. Ken's former Navy like my Dad, so we swap some stories and have a cooperative dinner around their table since ours is much too small. Then Ken takes us over to the Linden church and gives us a tour. It's a good solid building with a good foundation of people who love their area and each other. While not a large congregation, they make do and have strong ties that bind.

[Thursday, July 24, 2008 – Corning, MO](#)

Today's blog entry will continue yesterday's closing theme of community ties.

While arranging our campsites, I came across references to a church in Corning Missouri. It's “old German” Lutheran and has been around since the 1880's. The online reference said it was worth a visit, so last spring I made contact and requested to see it when in town.

Connie and Emmett Windhorst allowed us to park on their land tonight. They're parishioners over at the St John Lutheran Church and we got invited to share a dinner and then make a presentation about our Trek and the original Battalion. It's a story none of the locals had heard and half the community was present. Literally.

Corning has a population of 21 and we had 12 people present. Corning is one of the railroad communities that slowly died due to various catastrophes over a number of decades. Not much left there, but the traditions and common bond forged by “their” church unites the local families. Let me tell you about what I learned.

As we toured this lovely old church, the local folks told us of its history and their efforts to maintain it and preserve it. At one time the Missouri River threatened to erode the original church site, so the community got together and moved the church about five miles. They used logs and teams to roll it to a safer location. Even still, a couple big floods have damaged it and the local community has lovingly repaired most of the damage. One place they left some damage showing was the old confessional booth where the water stains still indicate how deep the water got. Symbolic, no?

Currently, the church roof is in need of some major repairs to keep it from getting rain damage. The steeple needs help, the HVAC system needs improvement to keep the humidity, heat and cold from damaging the place and the parishioners have other projects they'd like to tackle if they can find the time and money.

It occurred to me that I'd been avoiding the "faith" part of this story. In my effort to NOT associate the Battalion Trek with religion, I'd de-emphasized the most important part of any endeavor – the belief that what you do matters.

It occurred to me that there was no basic difference between the march of the Mormon Battalion and the efforts by the St. John Lutheran church congregation of Corning Missouri to maintain their building as an important historic site. Both are founded in faith, devotion and duty.

This has been a defining realization for me that will influence the remainder of the Trek. I shall not be afraid to treat the subject of faith as a theme common to all who want to maintain a tradition founded in something worthy of preservation – whether a building or a memory.

Thanks Connie for helping me get past a mental block on this.

[Friday, July 25, 2008 – Mound City, MO/Council Bluffs, IA](#)

We need to hustle today to get everything done to prepare for running back to Council Bluffs. I have four, hour-long presentations to prepare and I've only completed two of them. Yesterday has placed a whole new perspective on how I want to approach a couple of them.

Before hiking, we stop by the historic St. John Church at Corning to view the stained glass windows during the day and to see some additional details we missed last night. Truly beautiful and worth the effort to see if you're in the vicinity. Connie Windhorst really loves "her" little chapel and one can see why.

Denny (Phebe) hikes in the morning about 12 miles. The heat is bearable and she makes good time, so we decide to call it a day about 2 PM and head back to Council Bluffs for our planned weekend events.

When we get on I-29 going north, we soon notice a sign that reads "Council Bluffs – 75 miles" and are amazed that we've already come so far in so few days.

Arriving at the Western Trails Center (NOT the LDS Mormon Trails Center which is in Nebraska), I meet with Dick Zion to verify our computer will work with their internet hookup for the presentations. All is well, so I join the others across the levee and begin putting up our tents. We meet the Lewis & Clark reenactors; Dave, Dwight and Dean who are most gracious and invite us to partake of a Saturday evening supper with them.

Also arriving is Bob Tingey from Enoch, Utah. Bob is the Battalion Trek's president. He's driven out, bringing additional supplies and equipment we need. Bob is going to be hiking with us through August 1, then he has to scoot home. More about Bob on another day.

Then we have to hustle off to the Kaneshville Tabernacle Visitor's Center. The local LDS community is putting on "Come Home to Kaneshville" and we're invited to march with their actors during the Mormon Battalion segment. It was fun – not that any significant part of the story was told, but it was fun.

[Saturday, July 26, 2008 – Council Bluffs, IA](#)

OK – if you weren't paying attention yesterday, we've returned to Council Bluffs on purpose. We are participating at the **Western Historic Trails Center** as part of the Lewis and Clark "White Catfish Encampment."

Allyson and Denny make us a yummy oatmeal breakfast, then Bob, Jerry & I work on our camp so visitors will see some interesting things. We finish our last major construction project, a dining fly under which the cooking preparations can take place without being in direct sunlight. Then, it's off to the seminars for me while the others meet visitors in camp.

First up, I talk about the original Battalion's march to California. In the afternoon, I speak as part of a panel and share a few thoughts about the Battalion's enlistment at Council Bluffs.

The L&C guys make a wonderful dinner of roast pork, potatoes and carrots. We bring dutch oven rolls and dessert. Allyson conducts a free-style interview with Dwight, Dean and Dave for her conference paper. Dwight said his motivations for being a reenactor are, "Education, preservation and gratification." Presenting "living history" helps educate the public. Preservation of old skills such as blacksmithing helps us interpret the past. Being able to educate and preserve history is gratifying to Dwight. He enjoys it or else he wouldn't do it. Reenactors are a fun bunch.

I have to run off and speak with the "Mouth of the Platte" historical society. My comments and answers to questions take a decided turn towards the importance of faith in motivating the explorations by Lewis and Clark, for motivating the men who joined the Battalion and all those who commit themselves to doing things that matter. Still working on the concepts, but in speaking from the heart, I think I'm getting closer to having a more broad approach to the Trek.

[Sunday, July 27, 2008 – Council Bluffs, IA/Mound City, MO](#)

Day two of the White Catfish Encampment. The L&C guys have Bob Tingey and I over for breakfast. The rest are in the RV. They also present us with commemorative L&C "Friendship" coin necklaces. They're modeled after the medals given to Indian chiefs during the original Voyage of Discovery. I'm going to wear mine for the entire trip to honor them.

Allison and Denny go to church. This is one of the two Sundays I've committed myself to participate in events that will prevent me from attending, but the opportunity to present the Battalion's story to a sizable audience seems justifiable to me.

The first presentation is about Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, son of Sacajawea of the Lewis & Clark Expedition. "Pomp" as Clark liked to call the baby was a scout for the Battalion after they left Santa Fe. My presentation is courtesy of Wilma Diesen of Midland Michigan who helped us with our tribute to Philip St. George Cooke on Veteran's Day 2005.

The second presentation is about the Battalion member's return to Council Bluffs area after their discharge. My comments continue to focus on the common themes of duty and service. Hopefully the talks were received well.

After we break down the camp, we drive back to Mound City where we stopped hiking on Friday. We have high winds and there's storms all around but we stay dry all night – but it's a short night.

Monday, July 28, 2008 – Oregon, MO

Bob Tingey hiked with me today for the first time. Fortunately for both of us, we had a nice cloud cover, a good southeasterly breeze and temperatures were moderate. That's lucky. After not hiking a couple days and having been in the river bottoms for a couple weeks, today's hills were – well, tiring and stretched out the old calf muscles.

We take lunch at Oregon, sitting in the same town square where the Battalion ate their lunch 162 years ago. Hiking into town, we could clearly discern the old road route from the north.

We stop in the newspaper office and get some helpful information about Holt County's early roads. In addition, we get a whole lot of information about early Mormon settlers in the area. We'll pass it along to Bob Sharp and Gail Holmes in Council Bluffs.

At the County Recorder's office we also get some maps and helpful information about old roads leading to the Nodaway River crossings. It appears there were few very roads in 1846, so we start wondering if the Battalion didn't have improved roads available for most of this section.

Camp tonight is beside the high school. As it gets dark, there's a street light beside us that has a malfunctioning light sensor, so it goes off and on with a five minute cycle – all - night – long. Annoying, but we need the windows open to stay cool.

Tuesday, July 29, 2008 – Amazonia, MO

We head off slightly after sunrise – but you wouldn't know it because for the second day in a row we have complete cloud cover and moderated temperatures. It doesn't get over 85, quite unusual for Missouri this time of year. Bob is SO lucky.

We spend the early part of the hike today engaged in "speculative history." We take turns asking each other "What if..." questions about Battalion history and wondering what would have happened if different decisions had been made. For example, "What if James Allen hadn't died?" or "What if Lt. A. J. Smith hadn't sent the families to Pueblo and they had attempted the route past Santa Fe?" Three hours of speculating about alternate endings to the Battalion story was very stimulating. Maybe we need a seminar on this topic.

After about 8 miles, we come to the Nodaway River, a major crossing for the 1846 Battalion. Their exact crossing area and method (wading or ferry) is speculative, so we're interested in learning more local history. Our visit to the newspaper editor yesterday was one tactic to scare up some information.

After crossing the river, a local farmer stops and asks what's up. After explaining our little quest, Mark Jennings says we need to go talk to Danny Floyd who lives in Fillmore, a town up the road, so Bob and I ditch the hiking and run over to Fillmore. Danny is a blacksmith, reenactor, mayor and has a list of other

accomplishments and interests I won't go into. Let's just say there's probably nobody else we could have found in the area who could help us as much. Turns out the old river crossing was on his dad's property and Danny had the maps to show the location but doesn't have a way to copy for us to have our own.

The Andrew County Historical and Genealogical Society Museum in Savannah is just a few more miles east, so Bob and I get them on the phone and arrange to meet with Jean who has the original maps in her files. She agrees to come in (on her day off) and let us have access to the files. She even copies the originals for us so we can continue to work after we leave. Woo-hoo! Score!

On Wednesday, July 29, 1846 it was recorded that they hiked through the small town of Jamestown – which didn't exist for more than a few years. No trace exists today – except for these maps and we now know where Jamestown was located, strengthening the argument for our proposed route into St. Joseph. That makes it two days in a row of key mapping information we've located. Can it get any better? I fear I haven't left enough time in the schedule to conduct research. Dang!

The Amazonia Lions' Club hosts us for the evening and lets us use their parking lot for our campsite. We get a slight rain shower and decide to paint Bob's flag in the clubhouse. According to Steve Allie at the Frontier Army Museum, the United States was adding states so quickly in 1846 that they started making flags with blank blue fields. When a flag was issued to a new military unit, they had to paint their own stars on the flag. Bob decides on a 7-6-7-6 scheme for his stars; seven in the top row followed by six, seven and the bottom row of six stars, totaling 26 stars – on both sides. Can you spell "tedious?"

[Wednesday, July 30, 2008 – St. Joseph, MO](#)

Another (THREE IN A ROW!) cloudy day with moderate temps despite a forecast for blistering heat. Bob Tingey is SO LUCKY! We should be baking. I can't believe it.

Buchanan County gives us a "hat trick" of THREE DAYS IN A ROW of finding historic documents helping with the route. The County Recorder's office takes a little while to find it, but comes up with the 1855 survey of the area. A little dated for us, but the information on the maps is key to understanding the 1846 route. We are quite excited. Not nearly as many wagon roads as you'd expect there to be.

Allyson goes to the Patee House and Doll Museum while Bob takes in the Pony Express Museum. Denny and Jerry rest. I run back to the Recorder's office and photograph the maps we need. There's a little confusion and I almost didn't get to photo the maps. Why they would rather COPY the maps on a photocopier than let me photograph them escapes me. It's so hard on the original maps and books.

I continue hiking and complete the day's entire distance in by 6 PM. We decide to camp at Lewis & Clark State Park because we need to shower and wash our clothes. Original plans were for an unimproved camp in a conservation area up in the bluffs along tomorrow's route. Pretty area, but not what we need tonight. For dinner, Bob makes us his famous "Man-stew" – chunky style veggies and meat. Delicious.

[Thursday, July 31, 2008 – DeKalb, MO](#)

Formerly known as Bloomington in 1846, we are following the original Battalion's route and march through the small town after getting up into the bluffs. DeKalb is pronounced "de-Cab." We are now just two days away from Fort Leavenworth - our first major goal.

We inquire if anyone might know about the old roads and get directed to a 93-year old local, Mr. Wilson. The mayor says he should record Mr. Wilson's life history. For 50 years Wilson and his wife ran the grocery store. "He floated the entire town from their one annual crop payment to another", said the mayor. We find Mr. Wilson and though he can't provide a lot of specific information we're after, he SHOULD be interviewed and his life story recorded.

I'd just like to note that this makes FOUR days in a row of overcast skies and moderate temperatures. This is HIGHLY unusual and Bob is SO LUCKY – but I'm glad he's bringing us good weather luck.

We decide to stay at Lewis & Clark State Park for a second night. Not the most practical, but we're having new problems with the electrical systems in the RV, so we want to be close to St. Jo for parts if we need them. All the wall plugs are dead and we can't get that circuit to respond. Dang! Almost a full week without a problem.

We celebrate arriving in the Leavenworth area by crossing the Missouri River into Atchison Kansas and checking out a Chinese food buffet. Not exactly period correct, I know, but warranted after two weeks without a break.

August 2008

Friday, August 1, 2008 – Weston, MO

Ahhhh! Sun in the early morning, but no sooner do we start hiking than the clouds roll in again and though it's quite humid, we don't have a blazing Missouri sun to cook us. Bob is SO LUCKY!

About 3 hours later, we enter Weston and hike to the historical museum where we're interviewed by the St Joseph newspaper. Charlotte is quite the young reporter and we spend an hour answering her questions, telling the Battalion story as it pertains to the area.

We get to camp at Weston Bend State Park about 1 PM just to find the electrical problems are worse. The air conditioner isn't working now and we're quite concerned about the tripped circuit. We run to the store and get a digital volt meter. As we open the inverter/converter to test, we note some REALLY BURNED wires. I can't help but wonder if this all goes back to the lightning strike two weeks ago. With Jerry's help we quickly locate a short circuit, splice the section of wire, re-route some of the wiring to prevent a future short and – voila! We're back in business.

This evening we present an "interpretive program" to about a dozen campers. We pull out the 1846 equipment – packs, blankets, clothes, gun and accouterments – then share the story. After about 30 minutes we answer questions, then thank the folks for sharing the time with us. A few of them stay to discuss politics, assuring us that "Mitt" [Romney] would have been their choice for president. We do have some friends in Missouri.

Saturday, August 2, 2008 – Weston, MO

We're taking the day off as we've essentially completed the hike to Fort Leavenworth. We'll accomplish the final few miles next week as part of the encampment and seminar hike.

I'd just like to note that since we're not hiking today, the temperatures have spiked at 99 degrees under cloudless skies. Bob is still SO LUCKY!

In the late afternoon, Bob and I run over to the Frontier Army Museum so he can tour it before he leaves for home tomorrow. I'm going to miss having Bob as my "hiking buddy."

In the evening, we play dominos and another game of chance. Bob is SO LUCKY! He wins almost every game. Dang! This really frustrates Allyson who is accustomed to winning – beating all the rest of us hands down in just about every game we play. We even manage to get to bed before midnight.

Sunday, August 3, 2008 – Weston, MO

We have another day off and attend the early services in Leavenworth. After church, Bob, Allyson and I run over to the Weston Historical Museum to view the materials they've gathered relative to "Mormons." It's pretty sparse, but a few useful nuggets.

While browsing the display cases, I notice a Civil War period photo of Sterling Price. It's the first likeness of him I've seen. You may remember Price as the Missouri militia general who was going to execute Joseph Smith at Far West. Alexander Doniphan and General Atchison both refuse to carry out the order and Price backs down.

During the Mormon Battalion's march, Price commands a regiment of cavalry which journey in close proximity to the Battalion. The LDS group is always a little leery of Price's intentions but there doesn't seem to have been any incidents between them.

Temperature is 104 in the shade as we leave the museum. It's supposed to be warmer tomorrow with a temperature index in excess of 120 degrees. This is more like the Missouri in summertime that I'm familiar with. But Bob isn't hiking, so it's OK. He's SO LUCKY!

We have a late afternoon dinner and say "good-bye" to Bob Tingey who has been with us all week. Bob is sad to go and we're sad to see him leave. He's done a fine job of helping us put the Trek together and work with the volunteer Board of Directors. There's still lots for him – and us – to do. Safe trip Bob.

We're staying put in Leavenworth this week conducting some research in the area, so our reports will not be about hiking. We should have reliable internet connections. My Mom will be happy about that.

With Bob gone, I'm seeking new applicants for my "hiking buddy" – but you have to be REALLY LUCKY!

[Monday, August 04, 2008 – Kansas City, MO](#)

Our first MAJOR problem has cropped up. Jerry's back has given out and he's had to fly home to Utah to see his doctor. He's basically OK, but he's been in pain for three weeks and enough is enough. So, we bundled him in the Suburban this morning and put him on a plane.

Jerry's been of immense help. He's our expert on vehicles, workshop skills, fixing anything and talking to people. Dad's got more stories than anyone and can relate to people very well, so we're going to miss him until he gets better enough to return to the field. Please keep him in your prayers.

This prompts the following appeal:

If you know of someone who can drive a car/RV trailer combo for a few weeks, please e-mail us ASAP at: Volunteer@battaliontrek.com

Denny, Allyson and I are at the KC Public Library. It's a very nicely remodeled bank and is classy. We've borrowed a conference room, hooked into the internet and are all busily catching up on e-mails and other items we've not had access to for weeks.

Since we're not hiking this week, we have an opportunity to fix some more items on the trailers and prepare for our next segment of the Trek. Once we leave Leavenworth next Monday, it's pretty much non-stop until Santa Fe where we will arrive in early October.

UPCOMING EVENTS THIS WEEKEND:

FRIDAY, Aug. 8 from 8 PM to 9 PM

CAMPFIRE PROGRAM @ Weston Bend State Park, BEE CREEK SHELTER off highway 45 east of Weston
Topic: Weston, Queen of the Missouri in 1846

SATURDAY, Aug. 9 at 7 AM to Noon

DAY HIKE into Fort Leavenworth: Leave Bee Creek Shelter @ 7 AM Saturday for a 9-mile hike to the Museum on post. BRING WATER! Government issued photo ID required to enter Fort Leavenworth. Vehicles must have proof of insurance as well.

SATURDAY, Aug. 9 at 6 PM to 9 PM

SEMINAR: Frontier Army Museum, Fort Leavenworth

http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/CSI/Museum_Information.asp

Topic: Fort Leavenworth at the Start of the Mexican War. What the Mormon Battalion Saw and Experienced.

Speakers: Sherman Fleek, author of "History May Be Searched In Vain" and reenactors from the Fort Leavenworth Historical Society. Details to follow.

Government issued photo ID required to enter Fort Leavenworth. Vehicles must have proof of insurance as well.

[Thursday, August 7 – Leavenworth, KS](#)

In the words of some of our 1846 predecessors, "Nothing of importance happened today."

Which, of course, isn't correct. We just fail to realize the importance of what happens at the time.

Today is our last "dead day" for quite awhile. It was spent calling to confirm next week's campsites and working through some last minute details for Saturday's hike with the Scouts from Olathe. For you non-Kansans', it's pronounced, Oh-LAY-THahh. Took me a couple tries to get it right myself.

[Friday, August 8 – Weston State Park, Missouri](#)

In preparation for tomorrow's hike into Fort Leavenworth, we've crossed back to Weston State Park, set up at the Bee Creek shelter and look like a right proper military camp. We put up both of the 1846 five-man tents, a large tent and the dining fly.

Denny and Allyson cooked a fine meal of cornbread and chicken soup, which really hit the spot this evening. For dessert, we had Dutch oven apple crisp.

The Olathe Scouts arrived about 7 PM and set camp quickly. They helped devour the dessert.

Sandy Miller from the Weston Historical Society came to camp with her husband, Bob. Sandy gave an overview of Weston's past up through the Civil War period. She's one of the local experts on the area, was entertaining and helped us fill in some of the details about the area we were interested to know more about.

Weston in 1846 had a population of over 5,000 persons. That was a shock to me. You don't get that sense from the Battalion journals, do you? Anyway, Weston has a lot of history and is working hard to keep the town growing - which it is primed to do being on the north end of Kansas City metro area and across from Leavenworth. Nice town.

[Saturday, August 9 – Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas](#)

Today's objective for the Scouts is to hike into Fort Leavenworth. We prepositioned some equipment and returned to camp, starting the hike about 0830. Our route brought us to the creek "about one mile south of Weston" where the 1846 Battalion camped and washed clothes. Here the original Battalion completed their month-end muster for the paymaster prior to reaching Fort Leavenworth.

The Olathe Scouts made decent time and at the end of the bluffs we stopped to share some history. Then we offered to let the Scouts march with Bob Tingey's 26-star flag as we hiked the levee paralleling the Missouri River. The flag changed hands a number of times as we made five miles along the levee.

To reach the river, we had to wade through some underbrush and trees, then we broke out onto the river banks across from the military post. The modern Missouri River is far different from the wide river of 1846. It's fairly narrow, deep and fast.

Scoutmaster Kent Hansen fulfilled one of my "secret desires" for the Trek. Unbeknownst to him, I REALLY wanted to ferry across the Missouri River onto Fort Leavenworth. The prior Wednesday evening, he mentioned that it "was too bad we couldn't get permission to ferry the boys across the river." Well, I jumped at the offer and made arrangements with Jeff Wingo and the levee board.

Once we were safely on the Kansas side of the river, we hiked up to the Main Parade square on post. There we outfitted the Scouts with our 1846 packs, belts and replica muskets. Reenactor Val John Halford of Utah gave some instruction, then he hiked us to the Frontier Army Museum where we were saluted by cannon fire. The Leavenworth reenactors had made us dinner and the Scouts departed the field for home.

In the evening, the Museum hosted a seminar. The topics were 1846 Battalion related and were: "Women in the 1840's", "Medical Qualifications & Practice pre-Civil War", "Military Cooking" and Sherman Fleek presented his take on "Why Study the Mormon Battalion?"

I'd like to say the seminar was well attended. It wasn't. It was an embarrassment to not have people show up for a high quality, free seminar about the Battalion.

We have quite a few of these events planned along the route and I sure do hope attendance improves.

[Sunday, August 10 – Ft. Leavenworth, KS](#)

Oooohhh.

We stayed up WAY too late last night! We grab a nice shower at the museum, have breakfast with Dave, Steve and Al, pack our stuff and head back to the RV to get ready for church.

Being a military town, even church things are done here with a military flavor. For example, there was an announcement that, "Choir practice will begin at thirteen hundred and end at thirteen-forty-five." Ya gotta love it. Brought a big grin to our faces.

Afterwards, we pretty much rest because Saturday was so long. Sorry about the blog. It will have to wait for another day.

[Monday, August 11 – Lansing KS](#)

At daybreak Jeff Wingo takes me onto post and I meet Val John Halford and Kinley Mauerman at the Main Parade ground. We suit up into our 1846 garb, put on our packs, pick up our muskets, have a prayer and start down the Military Road leading to the Santa Fe trail.

I'm not at all sure it's an accident, but the LDS church building is within a block or two of the Battalion's route out of the area. It would be interesting to know how the site was selected.

A Navy liaison officer stops to ask what we're doing, so we give the short version. A few blocks later, out comes a family to wish us well. Within another mile, a couple young mothers with their kids ask if we're the "Mormon group" she's read about. Notoriety is good and keeps us happy.

The guys have an appointment later in the day, so they leave about noon and I hike out the rest of the day. We truck on over to the Hall's property east of our route and set up camp. We hold an evening campfire program for some folks who stop by to chat. I dress up one of the young boys in the belts and gear for pictures. He's impressed by the musket most of all.

Best of all - The Cavalry arrives!!! My buddy, Paul Sandor pulls into the area and will help with the driving and reorganization because Jerry had to leave. Paul is one of our Board and a pretty neat guy. His wife Judy (another one of our favorite people) has loaned him to us for awhile (Thanks, Judy!)

[Tuesday, August 12 – Tonganoxie KS](#)

It's not a long day – just 15 miles. Bill Bohne of Leavenworth hikes with me. Paul Sandor (see yesterday) catches up with us for lunch at the county fair and we review our plans for traveling.

In the afternoon, we get the RV moved to Tonganoxie (pronounced just the way it looks, but the locals call it "Tongie") where we camp at the Mitchell's property. He's the Seminary & Institute director in Lawrence Kansas. It's late by the time they get home from all their activities, so we don't get to visit much in the evening.

[Wednesday, August 13 – Eudora KS](#)

Today we get to hike into one of my favorite towns along the route – Eudora Kansas. You may ask, "Why is Eudora one of your favorite towns?" I'll tell you.

When the Battalion passes through in 1846, they note the Delaware and Shawnee tribes are people they interact with. Albert Smith says he rode in a wagon with a missionary to the Delaware Indians. At the

Kaw (Kansas) River, they cross on a ferry owned and operated by Pascal Fish, a Shawnee tribal leader who also operated a farm in the area. Pascal is an educated man, a businessman, a farmer and a missionary to his people. The Battalion's cows get loose into Pascal's corn fields and they have to move further out of the area. By the way, the town of Eudora is named for Pascal's daughter who was born a few years after the Battalion passes through, but that's another story.

Last year the town dedicated a monument to Pascal and Eudora. It's a very nice work and catches the "father/daughter" relationship that must have existed. The town of Eudora is set to boom being between KC and Lawrence. They've invested heavily in their schools, recreation facilities and infrastructure. They have plans for Eudora. If I were in a mood to move, I'd consider Eudora.

We get interviewed by the local newspaper reporters, then break for dinner at Daniel's Ribs which was highly recommended to us by the locals. Perhaps I should mention that I'd been having a "Freedom Fries" fit the past couple days. Daniel's has "A Pound of Fries" and THEY ARE GOOD! So are the ribs, but I wasn't having a fit for those. Very good meal at a very good price.

[Thursday, August 14 – Willow Springs KS](#)

Did I mention that the weather is STILL cool, cloudy and unseasonably pleasant? This is strange. In fact, as we hike out of Eudora and pass Blue Mound, it starts a light rain that continues until late afternoon. Refreshingly cool but it makes for hiking in the grass along the roadway a little tricky. There's a LONG hill to climb alongside a narrow shouldered highway. I'm glad there isn't anyone hiking with me today. This is actually dangerous but there isn't an alternate route available.

In the evening, we camp at the Jardon's property just south of Willow Springs. This allows me to fulfill a second "secret wish" for Trek – to hike through REAL prairie grass. The Jardon's have put this site into a conservation program helping preserve native grasslands. The grass is over six feet tall. I wade into the field a little ways and am quickly lost to sight for the others. It's a shame there aren't more places like this for people to experience "the REAL west" of the early 1800's.

The Jardon's are a retired couple. Marvin and Norma are quite the gardeners and share their fresh veggies with us – squash, tomatoes and zucchini. Yum. We need fresh stuff now that we're cutting down on ... the national brand of chocolate sandwich cookies with white filling.

[Friday, August 15 – Overbrook, KS](#)

Paul drives me back up to Willow Springs to begin the day. This was the area where the 1845 Military Trail cut by Col. Kearny's South Pass Expedition ties into the Santa Fe Trail. The Battalion followed that route south in 1846 and camped southwest of the springs. This morning was foggy (in *August*???) and it lent a neat atmosphere to the photographs.

As I'm hiking along, Mr. Schwartz and I strike up a conversation roadside. He offers to have the pastor of his congregation include me in their prayer service at his church. Hey, if it keeps the weather like this, I'm all for it. Actually, the cooler weather seems to be helping the farmers. Not getting into a drought

this summer may make up for the poor spring they had out here, so let's pray for them, shall we? After all, it all starts with our farmers and ranchers. Let's not forget that.

We hike as far as Overbrook, then drive back for a second night camping at the Jardon's place. They've been very kind to us.

[Saturday, August 16 – Burlingame KS](#)

Burlingame is our goal and though it's still cool (low 80's), the 17 miles takes me until 4 PM.

As we come into town, we find the bricked city streets are over 100 feet wide – a remainder from the Santa Fe trail days when they could turn the wagons around in the main street. Today though, it's a beautiful Saturday and the motorcycle groups from KC and Lawrence are out in force. We see about ten groups totaling sixty or seventy bikes parked in the city center enjoying the day.

We camp at the city park which has been arranged for us by Dave Prescott, the local grain elevator manager.

[Sunday, August 17 – Burlingame KS](#)

We attend church at Colly Creek Ward in Topeka. Paul demonstrates his GPS directional driving aide on the way and we get ... a mite bewildered on the way to church. But we make it and have a good time meeting folks.

In the afternoon, we are taken for a local Santa Fe Trail tour by Dave Prescott and then invited over to his house for dinner. Denny makes some peaches and cream to share and we have a great evening swapping stories and background.

[Monday, August 18 – Elm Creek, KS](#)

Paul Sandor is such a hoot! And quick witted as well. For example:
I related that I intend to dedicate a week of blog entries thusly:

Monday – “Things I Saw Today”

Tuesday – “Things I Heard Today”

Wednesday – “Things I Smelled Today”

Thursday – “Things I Tasted Today”

Friday – “Things I Touched Today”

Paul's immediate response: “So, everything else you write in your blog will just be senseless.”

We end hiking at Elm Creek and preview tomorrow's route as we drive to our campsite outside Council Grove. We're getting ready for Paul to leave and have some more rearranging to complete. The lakeside campsite is gorgeous. We highly recommend it to anyone passing through the area.

[Tuesday, August 19 – Rock Creek, KS](#)

Paul headed home to Michigan this morning. We're going to miss the big guy. Between his humor, his abilities, his insights (which he shares!) and his uncomplaining attitude, he's been a great help this week in getting us reorganized. Safe trip buddy.

With only two of us now, Denny and I discuss how to get everything done in the hours available to us. We opt today to try a "leap-frog" hiking method that keeps both of us on the trail – just hiking different parts separately. We finish our sixteen miles by early afternoon, leaving us time to coordinate with the folks at Council Grove's tourism office, newspaper and a local historian. The official arrival at Council Grove tomorrow should be fun. More about that tomorrow.

At the end of the day, we drive back to the camp at Council Grove Lake, get our showers, wash some clothes and I get to spend a couple hours completing my blog catch-up session. Really everyone, I'm sorry it's so slow in coming. Hopefully, you will find it worth waiting for.

[Wednesday, August 20 – Council Grove KS](#)

"These are the times that try the soles of men..."

It just popped into my mind and I thought I should share it with you. Starting our dinner tonight, I accidentally stepped upon a small (very small) live coal which slipped between two of my toes. Ouch! But I'll be fine. Really.

We officially arrived in historically minded Council Grove Kansas today. "History Happens Here" is their theme and the town makes a sincere effort to keep their roots going. Because there's so much here, I won't try to list or comment on it all. This will be a long entry anyway. Just do an internet search for "Council Grove Kansas History" and you'll get a basic tour.

In order to spend time at the many sites here, we planned just seven miles of hiking for today, leaving the afternoon to browse. Denny is proud that she got her first blister during our hike. She will be fine. Really.

So, Denny and I were in full costume today; backpack, bonnet, belts, hat and musket. You'd think someone would get a little concerned about me carrying a musket down the major highway, but perhaps it's more common here in Council Grove.

The Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Board and many businesses work hard to help groups like us. This year they've already had two cross county bikers, one trans-continental hiker and are expecting a long-distance horse race event next month.

In 1846, there weren't any buildings here yet. In July, the Army had positioned a temporary blacksmith shop here to help the wagon trains going west as part of the war effort. It was probably on the east side of the Neosho River where there were lots of trees for use in fixing wagons.

One of the twelve "Madonna of the Prairie" sculptures is here. Craig McNeal interviewed Denny and I there for a newspaper article. Craig is the newspaper's second generation owner, editor, reporter,

photographer, ad-man and promoter of his city. The “Council Grove Republican” is the ONLY remaining daily newspaper published in town this size – about 2,500 souls. Five days a week, Craig and four staff members knock out a local paper that costs just 35 cents. It’s another example of faith, dedication and devotion to ones community.

The modern city has made a nice river walk as part of their historic tour. Another sculpture called “The Guardian of the Grove” stands at the entrance. “The Guardian” depicts a Kaw native brave with lots of symbolism included in the design. It’s an inspiring piece and positive in its message. “Guardian” is another example of faith in the future despite a period of severe trials and disappointments. The Kaw Nation is understandably proud of this monument to their people.

The original river crossing is still evident today. The river is about 20 yards wide and less than a foot deep at the rock crossing, so I hiked across and meandered down Main Street to the west end.

Yesterday, we made arrangements to stop in at the Terwilliger House. Kenneth & Shirley McClintock worked with others to restore an 1860’s home that had been a lot of things over the years. Now it looks much like it did before the turn of the century (1900) and they operate the House as an educational center. It’s set up as a bakery and restaurant with liberal helpings of history on the side.

In addition to being an enjoyable museum, while you dine (very reasonable rates) the opportunity to be educated about the local history, food, cultures and personalities makes a stop at the Terwilliger House something we highly recommend. Shirley is experimenting with native salads and has an interesting story about a native carving she found during the renovations of the building See their info at:

Now, we would be remiss if we did not mention another local business. The Council Grove Dairy Queen is owned by Dick Montgomery – another local promoter and historian. As we came into town, we passed the DQ and were FLOORED to see “Welcome – Mormon Battalion Trek” on their marquee – not once, but TWICE per cycle of the display. Yep, our name has been up in lights. Thanks Dick, for making us feel welcome. We’ll be in for Blizzards on Friday, our 29th anniversary.

And a final PS – Paul Sandor made it home just fine.

NOTICE: Until Monday morning, we will be camped at Neosho Campground at the Council Grove Lake just north of town. Site 5 to be specific. We will still be hiking during the days, but returning here for the nights.

And, we will put on an interpretive program at the Canning Creek Campground on Saturday evening at 7 PM. Bring your own seating.

[Thursday, August 21 – Diamond Springs, KS](#)

We are officially in the land of **BIG** ranches and farms. Some of these spreads cover five miles or more. Fields without fences. Roads without traffic. Land without people. It makes you feel small. Awesome. Just awesome.

One gentleman – Mr. Riffle came out to check to see if Denny was OK – said he couldn't believe it when the county wanted to put road signs with the names at the intersections. "Heck, I know I gotta go two miles this way and one mile that way to get to my neighbors' house. What do I need signs for? Shucks, it's for that 911 thing." Mr. Riffle owns only about one and a half square miles.

"I love being a farmer. I'm a small-town boy that married right. I thank my mother-in-law fairly often for letting me marry her daughter. After 30 years of bumping across those Santa Fe Trail ruts, I still get goosebumps when I think about what their lives must have been like. I can't imagine how hard it was for the women. They had to walk, take care of the children, cook and do all the other things women did."

Awesome. Just awesome.

[Friday, August 22 – Lost Spring, KS](#)

It was another lovely day. It's the first TOTALLY clear, bright sunshine, comfortably warm and breezy day we've had here in Kansas. Even though we're nearly a quarter of the way across the state, it's been cool and cloudy almost the whole time. Maybe we're going to escape the brutal heat that often occurs this time of year.

The plants and terrain have changed just since the first of the week. It's certainly drier. Groves of full sized trees away from the streams are giving way to wide open expanses of grasses. Types of trees are less varied with mostly cottonwoods and burr oaks concentrated along the streams.

We recorded the winds today. By late morning, we had a sustained breeze of about 15 MPH from the southeast shifting to the southwest later. The cottonwoods and grasses were spectacular waving in the wind. We also came across the first fields of sorghum we've seen.

Denny and I have been married 29 years as of this morning. We celebrated by hiking and meeting people, talking about things and enjoying our country and its history. We have four wonderful kids, five and a half grandkids, wonderful parents and a boatload of blessings. We're in reasonably good health and don't really want for much. We have sufficient for our needs and what else do we need? Ours is a charmed life for which we are grateful. We hope the next 30 are just as good as the first.

[Saturday, August 23 – Council Grove, KS](#)

We're back at Council Grove for the day.

There was one whale of a storm that started approaching about 9 PM and continued until nearly mid-day. "Deadly lightning" was the phrase the National Weather Service used to describe one of the most vigorous thunderstorms I've ever experienced. Bolts were popping off every second or so for three solid hours. We had sustained winds of 25+ MPH and gusts much higher than that from the northwest as the cold front approached.

The storm looked so bad on radar (yep, I booted the computer for this one!) I was convinced we had the possibility of a tornado, so about 5 AM we took refuge in a cinderblock shelter next to camp. Stayed

about 30 minutes before it calmed down enough to go back to the camper. Kind of sorry I didn't have the 1846 tent put up, but even if I did, I would not have stayed in it during this storm. One stands in awe of nature when it gets this wild.

After the storm front cleared out about 11 AM, Denny and I talked it over, deciding to skip today's hike, opting instead to catch up on some **pressing business matters**, do the wash and shopping in preparation for moving camp on Monday.

We also have an interpretive program planned for tonight at the campground. That's presuming we don't have any more storms this evening.

Our time at the library was spent contacting folks further down the trail to try and help coordinate special events – more seminars, firesides and day hikes where people have expressed interest. The library is closing in about 15 minutes, so I need to finish up and post these last three entries. Have a great weekend everyone.

[Sunday, August 24 – Council Grove](#)

Last night's interpretive program was attended by about a dozen folks and we were pleased with how it went. A mom brought her three sons fishing and each of them brought a buddy. They stopped by for our Battalion presentation. There were also two older couples and two of the Park rangers, all of whom said they enjoyed it. OK, so I guess that makes thirteen in all.

We finished there about 8:30 PM, packed up and scooted down to talk with Ken and Shirley McClintock some more. They agreed to let Denny tape them for use on the website. Ken discussed the area of Council Grove in 1846 and Shirley talked about their restoration of the Terwilliger House. They've put us onto some more lines of research and interest that we hope will bear fruit in the future.

We finished there about 10:30 PM and realized that we had somehow overlooked getting dinner earlier. Please don't be disappointed in us, but we just couldn't bear to go back and cook at that late hour, so we trolled the streets of Council Grove looking for a place to eat that late. Choice were: 1) the Hayes House bar & grill; 2) Sonic; 3) Pizza Hut. The Hut won out, so we went tromping in dressed pioneer at just about their closing time, ordered a pizza, only to realize that neither Denny nor I had brought our plastic with us. Dang! All we had was \$10 cash a lady had contributed as a donation to us.

So, we went scrounging in the truck for the extra quarters left over from doing the wash on Saturday. SCORE! We had just enough for a large everything pizza which we took home to scarf and were SO grateful for that food. Got to bed at midnight.

Church today was about 30 miles away in Emporia Kansas. Good homecoming for one of their own Elders who had been serving in Germany. Made us think much of our son Brian who is currently serving a mission in Mongolia.

These young men and women are entrusted by the LDS Church to represent the Lord, Jesus Christ to the world. They get no pay for their service; they receive little formal training; their language skills are

mostly learned “on the job” and they work very hard under very trying circumstances. Many are fairly average but accomplish so much in helping other people start to repair their lives. It is nothing short of amazing that we can put 50,000 of these young people into the nations of the world and have so few problems. They are from “every nation, kindred, tongue and people” and with the Lords’ help and humble hearts they manage to change lives – their own included.

That’s not a plug for the LDS church, just a fact that constantly amazes me when I sit and think about it. If only all volunteers were as effective and dedicated. We’ve been blessed with good help.

When we arrived home, we noticed that one of the tires on the flatbed trailer is flat. Dang! That means we get a late start tomorrow.

And a final thought: We’ve decided that the folks in Council Grove are a little more accustomed to seeing people dressed in 1800’s costume. Either that or they’re too polite to stare. We love Kansas.

[Monday, August 25 – Canton, KS](#)

Today was one of those “two steps forward, one step back” days. Or maybe it was “one step forward, two steps back.” I’m not going to candy coat this day for you. This is how it actually went. I was there.

I arrived at the tire store at 7 AM which didn’t open until 9 AM. I was second in line and the repair cost all of eight dollars. Since we camped at Council Grove Lake so many days, we had to move the trailer about 60 miles this morning to catch up where we needed to hike today, further delaying today’s hike. Of course, we needed to stop for gas along the way.

By the time we set up and drove back to where we needed to start hiking, it was after 2 PM. We started at the Cottonwood Crossing northeast of Canton, the town where we will end the day. In 1846, the Crossing was a muddy place and it took a lot of manpower to get across. It’s easy to imagine the wagons being roped down the bank, pushed and pulled across, then roped back up the other side. Pretty place.

But then, every so often there have been experiences on Trek that make me feel “unstuck in time” to use Kurt Vonnegut’s phrase. For instance: I’m walking along, watching the ridgeline off to my left for evidence of wagon ruts, thinking 1846 thoughts and my cell phone rings. Not strange because we get lots of phone calls. The phone number shows as “000” for the area code – and that is a little strange. The caller identifies himself as Elder Follett, a Battalion descendant. It’s always nice to hear from the descendants, so we chat for a few minutes before he mentions that he’s calling from EASTER ISLAND in the south Pacific. I have a strange moment of time & space disconnection. Can you imagine what the Battalion members would think about that? It made me shake my head.

Denny is a trooper. Even with her blister, she insists on helping “leap frog” hike today because of the late start. With 18 miles, I don’t argue, but I do ask how she’s doing frequently. We just keep hiking and the cooler day (low 80’s) with low humidity makes it a fairly comfortable day. Except I’m still having lingering distress from last week. You don’t want to know. Let’s just say, a step back, shall we?

About 3 PM, I realize that I don't have the GPS tracking unit either on my belt or in my haversack, so I check with Denny and she doesn't have it either. We check the support truck inside out and the trailer. No dice. We've lost our GPS dog, Spot. Two steps back.

Then Elder Follett from EASTER ISLAND calls me back to find out why we aren't moving on the tracking page. "Did you fall in the water at the lake" he asks (as I have another disoriented moment in time). So I explain the lost tracking unit and that we won't have live tracking until we find it or replace it. One step forward – someone actually cares.

Marion County's Santa Fe Trail chapter has done a great job of marking all their roads and producing a nice brochure detailing the SFT places in their county.

Today is the first time we've had to hike past sundown, but it was a beautiful sunset, so we didn't mind so much. Besides, we beat the day instead of it beating us. One step forward.

And, I spot a cute skunk at the roadside. I manage to get some fair pictures (nothing fantastic) but one daren't approach too close, should one? Getting sprayed would be a couple GIANT steps backward.

Denny completes her last leg and jumps in the truck to come pick me up. The truck won't start. No lights. No camera. No action. She calls me on the radio and I hike back a half-mile to the truck.

Fortunately, it's only a loose battery cable, so we're soon on the road for home. One step forward.

But, the Spot tracker device isn't in the other vehicle, so it's gone. "Spot" ran away. Probably my fault. I must have misplaced it, or it fell out or was left at one of the early stops today. Dang! Two GIANT steps backward for sure.

We have cold, leftover pizza (see yesterday's blog entry) as the main course. It's OK because we're too tired to fix anything.

I write this blog entry and try to connect for upload, but nothing doing. Not even one bar reception. Another frustration for the day.

Did I mention that we're camped at a buffalo nature preserve? How cool is that? We saw at least 100 of the big guys (and girls) on the hill this afternoon. Tomorrow morning should be interesting.

Bed is calling. One step forward, perform a half twist and I gently fall backward into the clutches of the mattress monster.

[Tuesday, August 26 – McPherson, KS](#)

A beautiful sunrise start today which provides an automatic attitude adjustment for me.

We pass through the Maxwell Buffalo Preserve on the way back to Canton to start the days hike. A number of bulls, cows and calves are visible as silhouettes on the sunrise ridge. We also spot a magnificent bull and cow elk in the early light. In 1846, the Battalion also mentions lots of antelope in the area.

Denny has some interesting feelings about being so remote. Perhaps I can get her to blog that and some other stuff she's shared with me.

Since she worked so hard yesterday, I ask Den to lay off some today. I hike 2 miles for each she hikes. We make good time, take lunch at 11 AM and are completely done hiking just after noon. Hooray! This day is almost in the bag and maybe we can get some other things done.

We check out the evening's campsite at McPherson then beat it back to the Preserve camp site to pick up the RV and the Henski Truck.

Remember yesterday's missive about "one step forward and two steps back"? Well.....

You may think that I'm making the following up for the dramatic effect or to gain pity, but I'm not. We have receipts to prove it. This afternoon, we had another flat - opposite the one we had yesterday. What are the odds? Again, I couldn't remove the lug nuts, so I lowered the tow hitch to protect the tire rim and we limped to town. I bought two new tires for the back and will use the leftover tire as a spare. Sensing that the handwriting on the wall portends future problems, I got the mechanic to remove the lug nuts from the other two trailer tires and lube them so WHEN I have to remove them, I can.

McPherson (pronounced: Muck-FUR-son – NOT Mack-FEAR-son) is a "happening place." It's an oil town with a big (but clean, VERY clean) refinery and let me tell you folks, there's LOTS of oil being pumped out here in Kansas. Almost every well we've passed is active.

In the evening, the entire bishopric of the local LDS congregation stopped by to coordinate with us for tomorrow night's activity. We had a good time sharing stories, comparing experiences and taking pictures of each other. The women especially had fun chatting. It's appreciated when folks stop in and chat for awhile.

Daughter Rita and I had some things in common – music, sports, etc. We both grew/are growing up in communities with a low LDS population. On one hand it's easy to see the difference the church makes in your life. On the other hand, your values are different. My hat's off to all the youth who live in difficult circumstances, who struggle to find others with similar standards, who grit their teeth and stick to it. Keep it up; it's worth it in the long run.

[Wednesday, August 27 – South of Windom, KS](#)

We have arrived at the "Little Arkansas" (the locals say it "r-CAN-sis" – not "R-can-saw") stream. The 1846 Battalion arrived here on a Friday, September 4th, and though it seems we're a week ahead of schedule, things that are coming will test our mettle.

We are encamped on the property of Mr. Joe Swanson. "I have the prettiest wagon ruts on my property", he proudly claimed when we first spoke a few months ago. He may well be right about that. There are at least four very nice swales and we pitch our 1846 tent and spend the night fifty feet from the Santa Fe trail.

We've been joined in camp this evening by about seventy folks from Wichita, Newton and McPherson who drove out to hear us talk about the Battalion and the local history. Their time is very short, so the presentation is "off the cuff" regarding my thoughts about Melissa Coray's "salivation pebbles" while walking today. I hope it made sense and was worth their trouble to come so far.

[Thursday, August 28 – Lyons, KS](#)

It was in this area that the Battalion first spotted buffalo. We pass a couple of bovine bulls that are bellowing at each other across the ridiculously small barbed wire fences separating them. The male posturing seems quite funny to me. The cows don't seem impressed. The fact that the enraged bulls are so close to us worries Denny somewhat, so we mosey on down the road. (See my blog entry of July 8 to appreciate my restraint)

We also pass a couple of other historic sites; the "Stone Corral" and the fort to protect it. Both were developed after the Battalion's time, but it's still fun to see these places we've read about. The properties are owned by friends of Joe Swanson and we met them last night before the campfire program. Nice folks. They've gussied up the trail route with metal cut-outs representing wagons and oxen that stand against the skyline. Nice touch.

[Friday, August 29 – Ellington, KS](#)

Denny and I put in about eight miles before noon. She was writing in her journal when a property owner approached the car to see if things were alright. Mr. Sharpe told us there are some nice ruts on his land so we followed him out to a pasture that his father and grandfather before him refused to plow. The four swales are about two feet deep, not very wide or long, but they are well preserved and three generations of his family have helped preserve this little bit of history for us all.

After lunch, Vanessa Everhardt and two of her kids join the Trek for a couple days. They're experienced reenactors, having participated in Renaissance period events. It's their first foray into "modern" history.

First on our list are the famous "Ralph's Ruts" northwest of Chase Kansas. To see them, go three-quarter of a mile north of US Highway 56 on 4th Road. Off to the east of 4th Road and well marked with signs, there are two tremendous swales, each about five feet deep, thirty feet wide and a few hundred feet long. They really get you in the mood of trying to imagine the oxen bellowing as they pull up the long incline, of the teamsters yelling, the wagons creaking. It's not hard to imagine such a scene.

A little further on, following "Avenue L" (yep – where in "L" are we?) to the west, we passed the location of the Plum Buttes, a couple of large sand dunes the Battalion passed on September 6th. We even find a few small plum bushes with fruit that aren't quite ripe but show a local farmer's sense of history and interest in preserving something trivial, but significant in the journals from so long ago.

We get to Ellingwood about 4 PM, pull off our shoes to adjust and take a moment to sit in the shade. The former mayor and his wife greet us and give us a 2-liter bottle of pop (soda or generic "coke" to some of you) and chat with us under the trees for awhile. Ellingwood is working hard to preserve itself and not fall into decay. They're doing an admirable job of it and we all agree that we like the town.

Did I mention that Zachary is an eleven year-old Scout? He knocks down about 9 miles today and completes a number of Scout requirements which I discuss with his Scoutmaster. It was hard for him, being nearly twice the required 5-mile hike, but Zach does good. He and I help set up the tent, get water and do some of the other chores.

Denny, Vanessa and Nichole work together to make dinner for us all and we have a nice sunset to help set the mood. For dinner, Nichole makes biscuits in the Dutch ovens – a first for her and they are all quickly consumed. The bean stew is delicious as well.

Finally, we all turn in for the night with the Everhardt's staying in the 1846 tent.

[Saturday, August 30 – Great Bend, KS](#)

It's hard to believe we're already here. On the maps, Great Bend seemed SO FAR AWAY a few months ago as I was planning the Trek.

We get a sunrise start and the Everhardt kids knock out today's 11 miles in good time. Mom Vanessa is riding the "sick wagon" because her boots chewed up her ankles and toes. Major blisters and a raw spot on her heel. Haven't seen one of those for years. Determined lady, however, common sense prevails over historic desire. Denny is happy to have someone to talk to during the day while I'm hiking.

Duane Rae is a Great Bend local who helps us move the vehicles today. Duane is also a recent Battalion enthusiast, has scouted out a hiking route for Monday and is helping put together a slide show to share. He's retired Marine and still looks like he could take on a mission or two. We appreciated his assistance and he even hiked a couple miles with us sharing his knowledge of the area.

Our hosts are the Barton County Historical Society which has graciously developed an evening program to share local history and let us share the Battalion story. We are at the Museum just south of town and it's a fine facility. It's worth a stop and a couple hours browsing the collections. There's even an "iron lung" machine. If you haven't seen one, you should. Polio was beaten just as I was born and I remember getting the sugar cube with vaccine on it. Now, we NEVER see someone in the USA with polio disabilities. Amazing changes in just one generation.

At 7 PM, we gather in the museum's library for the presentation. I'm nervous because it will be the first "official" public use of our Virtual Trails website. While a few locations don't show the way I intended them to, mostly the software performs as we want it to and I'm generally pleased. About 85 folks attend and that's gratifying as well. Most had never heard of the Battalion and we're able to share the story in a fairly organized fashion using the VT materials.

The Everhardts decide to spend a second night and are invited to "camp out" at the home of Dan and Deanna Curtis. Showers and washers are such nice things. We've grown to appreciate them.

Personally, I can only make about three days before I HAVE to have a shower and change clothes. The body salts deposited from sweat attracts air moisture and you always feel clammy. Sorry, but I thought

you should know. The 1846 journalists didn't record much about personal hygiene, so we're left to our imagination, but I know they didn't shower – ever.

[Sunday, August 31 – Great Bend, KS](#)

We arrive for church during the opening song and have a good time. Afterwards, they have a youth activity planned and a snack lunch for all to enjoy. We're invited to stay, so we do.

The Everhardt's part company and they head home while we head back to the trailer for a short respite. In the late afternoon, I join some families out at the Scout reservation where we camp for the night in preparation for tomorrow's hike to Pawnee Rock. Nothing fancy; just the 1846 tent and lots of bug spray.

Have I mentioned that the mosquitoes here in Kansas are a particularly large and fearless breed? Well, they are. They don't even flinch when you smack them and it took me awhile to realize you really have to smack them hard or you'll be hitting them again in the near future. And they really ARE bigger than most breeds of mosquito I'm familiar with.

No moon. It's a dark night alone without my Phoebe. I don't sleep well.

September 2008

[Monday, September 1 – Pawnee Rock, KS](#)

At 5 AM, an odd “hoot owl” starts calling to get us up and there’s murmuring in the camp. Must be descendants of Laman or Lemuel in this community (just kidding).

It’s pitch black for about 30 minutes until the eastern sky starts to brighten and Orion starts to fade out of sight.

There are families with lots of little ones that need food, a change of clothes, equipment to be stowed and in general, it’s very much like what would have occurred back in 1846. It was fun to watch – especially since I wasn’t in charge of this event.

Finally, just at sunrise, we get on the road. There’s about 35 folks, ages 4 up to early 60’s; men, women, children, Scouts. The Cub Scouts, most of the 11-year old Scouts and the women folk hike about 6.7 miles to fulfill the requirements, then they drop off at the vehicles and head home.

That leaves about 15 of us “old Scouts” to hike to Pawnee Rock, still some 8 and a half-miles further. Most make it; some need the sag wagon but we eventually get everyone to the Rock for group pictures. I’ve decided that large group hikes are difficult to conduct and impossible to get everyone to the end at the same time – so any events have to be at the start, not the end.

In the evening, the Great Bend LDS congregation has a get-together picnic at Pawnee Rock and we share some insights into the Battalion and our Trek. During the day, a couple of the Scouts ask me, “How did they do it?” - meaning the original Battalion’s march. My reply is that they just got up every morning, put their pants and boots on and started out again. There really wasn’t much choice for them, was there? It was keep going or die. Most of our decisions don’t have that immediate consequence, so it seems harder for us to imagine that kind of life.

But, what IF our decisions had life and death consequences? Would we work harder? Faster? Smarter? It’s interesting that our more subtle lifestyle has consequences every bit as life threatening as did the original Battalion members 162 years ago. Things haven’t changed that much - not really.

[Tuesday, September 2 – Pawnee Rock/Larned, KS](#)

And the rains came down and the floods came up.

While having a wonderful breakfast provided by Linda McCowan, it started raining. And it has rained hard and steady all day, even unto the nighttime. Yea, verily, it hath rained exceeding all our prior rains – three inches at least.

Because of the hard rains, we decide to forego hiking today in favor of getting together with Dr. David Clappsaddle from the Santa Fe Wet/Dry Chapter just down the road in Larned. David tours us around to various sites, trail ruts and places that post-date the Battalion but are important to the Santa Fe story.

In deciding WHERE to hike, it was necessary to find some reliable sources that could help me correlate Battalion's journalist entries with known Santa Fe wagon routes. David is one of those impeccable sources. The section from Great Bend over to about Dodge City was particularly vexing to this novice.

Limited to the few sources available to me at home in Michigan and hampered by my only recently coming to the topic, it's understandable that my early interpretation has some ... errors. There. I've admitted it and I intend to repent as best I can. David will be my confessor and help me get on the right track.

[Wednesday, Sept 3 – Larned, KS](#)

We had a short hike day planned for yesterday but since we got rained out we shifted it to today. The rain doesn't let up until about an hour after we start hiking. Denny and I use the oilcloth to keep from getting soaked and it works pretty well. It's the first time Denny's hiked with it and she's surprised at how warm it keeps you.

The route follows the "Dry Route" out of Pawnee Rock. This is the section David Clappsaddle is helping us decipher from the journals. We know the original Battalion used the first part of the Dry Route, but their statements are confusing on just where they camped around the Pawnee river here at Larned. South of Larned the Wet Route follows close to the river, while the Dry Route slowly diverges to the west. It's fun to hike along and actually see this subtle ridgeline and know that's where they hiked.

Because of the heavy rains, we decide to confine our hike to Highway 56 and avoid the clay backroads today. We're about a half to a full mile east of the actual trail, but we don't want to get stuck again. Heavy rains like this are rare so this won't be a habit for us. Just for today we will be circumspect.

We've noted before that wagon trains like to stay on ridgelines to avoid going up and down gullies. Today, it occurred to me there were a couple other reasons the old wagon trains like to stay on ridgelines; first, it afforded the opportunity to see into two watersheds, doubling the chance of finding watering holes. Second, by being on ridgelines it enabled them to see anyone approaching, thus, it was harder for ambushes to be affected before detection. Smart they were. I'm learning lots by just walking and thinking about what it was like.

We decide to move the trailers over to Larned from Pawnee Rock. Alas, the ground didn't firm up enough after the deluge yesterday and we're quickly stuck. It seems half of the folks in Pawnee Rock came out to see the Henski truck and trailer get yanked out by one of the local boys who has a big, bad 4-wheeler. Actually, I'll let Denny tell this story in the book – if we write one. It's too painful for me to speak about.

[Thursday, Sept 4 – Garfield, KS](#)

We start late, about 10 AM (see yesterday's last paragraph). Almost immediately, Denny is accosted by a zealot Kansas State Trooper who informs her that we cannot hike on any part of the road; we must stay on the gravel apron or hike in the grass. This is the first time any trooper has indicated a problem and

we've been passed lots of troopers. So, how big of a problem can this be? Anyway, we start hiking off road – especially since he keeps driving back and forth by us as he tickets three people within the hour.

You know where this is going, don't you? Yep. After 450 miles of injury-free hiking and within 30 minutes of the Trooper's directive, I manage to find a well disguised animal hole in the grass just large enough to accept my right foot and twist the ankle. After rolling around on the ground in a modest degree of pain (about an "8" frowny face, I'd say) for a few seconds, I radio "Man down" to Denny.

Happily, after walking it off, the sprain's not bad enough to stop hiking, so we get back to it. Even though we started late we make very good time and finish the 17 miles by 2 PM. In fact, we are happy to report that with today's march, we have officially completed a shade over 25% of our expected total mileage. David Clappsaddle comes over in the evening and we chew on the Battalion journals trying to make sense of some subtle aspects of their trail here in the Larned area. It's not easy and we finally throw up our hands in frustration. Between his research and the journals, the trail they took is still open to various interpretations. Dang!

[Friday, Sept 5 – Larned, KS](#)

We're going to stay here in Larned today to let my swollen and tender right ankle rest while we conduct some business and do the wash. Denny has her hair cut and gets a medical checkup – oh, and I catch up on posting the blog.

Now, you'd think that I would think of and plan for these practical aspects of life while organizing the Trek, but sadly, I'm kind of focused on specific goals to the exclusion of life's realities – like eating. It's a vexation to my dear wife, but she's kind enough not to point it out to me for a few weeks, then she puts her foot down.

In the afternoon, I manage to get over to the Santa Fe Trail Center west of Larned and see the place. It has some pertinent displays for our time period, has a library I intend to visit in the future and a very nice staff working there. The sod house outside is particularly interesting to me. They're so practical for the environment and at the same time so very impractical for the Anglo lifestyle which the pioneer settlers tried to maintain in those sod huts. Those women were so patient. Mine is too.

[Saturday, Sept 6 – Kinsley, KS](#)

We have slipped a day behind in our hiking due to the very wet weather and my ankle, but we were able to get out this afternoon and get our 16 miles in. Dang!

We finished a tad past Kinsley following Highway 56, the main road, instead of hiking the dirt/mud back roads. This is somewhat dangerous due to the speed limit (65 mph) and the fact that the light is bad being very cloudy and dark.

The evening has been good to continue catching up on work, blog and things we've needed to do. I spent a couple hours retracing our exact route and campsites in Google Earth. That's preliminary to making a Battalion Road Guide someday. Maybe that will be the book we write?

[Sunday, Sept 7 – Larned, KS](#)

We decide to attend church in Dodge City, because that's what our schedule has us down to do. It's about 55 miles away from Larned where we're camped, so we spend about 2 hours driving to and from church and it gives us a preview of the next three days. The folks at Dodge are very friendly and we have a good Sabbath day.

While in Dodge, we check out the various options for camping and decide to stay at an RV park so we can have internet connection. Folks, when we leave Dodge mid-week, we're going to go REMOTE. Following the Cimarron Cutoff, we don't expect to have many opportunities to connect but we will do our best to keep you updated.

If you want to preview our route, get an atlas and find Dodge City. Follow highway 56 west (left on the map) to the little town of Ingalls. Now, draw a diagonal line down and left from Ingalls to the southwest corner of Kansas. That's pretty much our route through September 21st.

We have ordered a new SPOT tracking unit and it should arrive by late next week. The new tracking URL will be posted as soon as we verify the thing is working.

FUNNY TRUE STORY

Here's one of the funniest things we've heard so far.

A few days ago, a lady who knew about the Trek and had met us told us the following story:

One of her neighbors (town will remain unnamed) told her (in a scandalized voice) that, "There are *gypsies* in town. They even have a portable toilet on their trailer."

<Cough, cough> That would be us, I think.

OK, time for bed. We have to make up some time/distance the next few days.



[Monday, September 8, Windthorst, KS](#)

We put in another 18 miles today working our way down towards the Arkansas River. And, just so you know – despite my earlier post, it really IS pronounced like the state of Arkansas. Some of the old pioneers even wrote it out phonetically as "Arkansaw" – so we know it's not really "R-Kansas."

A few words about today's weather: Windy, drizzly, gray, cold. It only got up to about 65 today and it felt like the wind matched the temperature. Pretty strong blow. Until noon, we were hiking in the clouds. Yep. The cloud base was at ground level – really. One of the weirdest things I've seen. My felt hat kept getting blown off, so I switched to my straw hat that has a chin strap. HA! Didn't lose it once.

The 1846 Battalion also battled poor weather in the area. As they arrived at the Arkansas River/Pawnee Fork crossing, they got dumped on. It rained all day and apparently blew up a storm too. They were soaked and couldn't cross the Pawnee because it was swollen. Same for us. The Pawnee was pretty full

and the rain certainly would have made crossing more difficult.

We moved the trailer to Dodge City and will drive back to continue from Windthorst to just about Fort Dodge which is a few miles southeast of Dodge City.

A word about Windthorst. Remember our ranting about how beautiful St John Lutheran church in Corning Missouri was? Well, the Catholic church at Windthorst Kansas is well worth stopping to see as well. It is over 100 years old, the center for the surrounding Catholic communities/parishes and sports some pretty incredible stained glass windows. Don't miss this location if you're in the area. It's about 7 miles south of highway 56.

[Tuesday, Sept 9 – Fort Dodge, KS](#)

Leaving Windthorst, we decide to not tempt the Dirt Road Fates since it is still cool and wet. We modify the route somewhat to allow us to stay on hardtop. This change throws us a little west of our desired route close to the river, but at least we don't have to worry about getting stuck (again).

We're passing the southern "bend" of the Arkansas River along the Wet Route. The Battalion arrived here on September 11, 1846. They had started on the Dry Route after crossing at the Pawnee Forks crossing at Larned, then Lt. Smith changed back to the Wet route. According to Lt. Emory, General Kearny had led the rest of the US military forces down the Wet route and we can only speculate as to why Smith attempted the Dry. There are a couple of obvious options: first, that Smith confused the two since they are so close during the early sections, or second, that he really did intend to follow the Dry to save time then changed his mind. This is an area for more study if someone wants to take it on as a pet project.

We're also speculating that the Battalion camped across from Johnson's Island, a favorite camping location about the correct distance for their hike this day. Now, Johnson's Island is where Philip St George Cooke in 1845 prevented a band of Texas ruffians from accosting some Mexican traders using the Santa Fe Trail. Called the Snively Affair, Cooke's forceful handling of the Texas brigands earned him the praise of not only his government, but also the Mexican government! How's that for irony?

[Wednesday, Sept 10 – Dodge City, KS](#)

We commute back to Fort Dodge this morning and continue our hike into and past Dodge City. Yep, they are different locations about five miles apart. The town of Dodge City didn't exist until the 1850's after Fort Dodge was built so there aren't any references to it in the Battalion journals. Dodge City (back then) was a typical "just off the military base" kind of town: saloons and other "diversions" calculated to separate the soldiers from their pay. Later, the cattle drives brought a whole new slew of folks: cowboys, ranchers, towns-people. Bat Masterson, Wyatt Erp and other famous frontier lawmen tried to keep things in line.

While in Dodge (today), we are hosted by the Dodge City Convention Bureau. Jan Stevens and her staff are very "upbeat" about Dodge. "Get the Heck 'Into' Dodge" is their new buzz-phrase. They capitalize on the "wild west" period when Dodge got started. Older folks (or rerun fanatics) will remember that the

TV program “Gunsmoke” was set in Dodge. The tourist mecca “Boot Hill” has some great collections but since we arrive after Labor Day, lots of the live performance excitement is missing. We’re going to return sometime in the future to see it all.

Dodge is a busy town. Cattle is king. The second largest meat packing plant in the world is here and there are some other pretty large ones as well. It’s a normal mid-sized town with a couple colleges, lots of churches and businesses that support cattle and agriculture. We passed one of the cattle auctions today.

For lunch, we stop into City Central as hosts of Inga. I can highly recommend the Steak Philly sandwich, but then, I’m a sucker for Phillies. Very yummy.

Leaving town and hiking further west along HW 50/400, we pass a historic marker about the Caches and finish our day at the magnificent trail swales about 9 miles west of town. Off to the north of the highway and on the ridge, the Convention Bureau has laid out a nice interpretive walk. The boardwalk carries you right over three large swales which stretch off over the hill into the distance. They are beautiful and again, I can imagine the wagons, the men, the women and the feed stock following along towards the Cimarron Crossing, just a day ahead of us now.

[Thursday, Sept 11 – Cimarron Crossing west of Ingalls, KS](#)

We remembered today all those who have recently fallen for this county. Even as other memorials were held, we held a short memorial service for Alva Phelps who died here on this lonely stretch of river in 1846. He was just 32 years old with four children and a wife back in Council Bluffs.

War all too often involves those who should least be called upon to bear the burdens of conflict. Families are divided and disrupted. Lives of promise for constructive work are cut short in destruction or limited by disability. Spirits are crushed while minds are tormented by things seen and done. War truly is hell.

Still, there are things worth fighting for: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, equality under the law, the safety of our families and preservation of all those freedoms guaranteed in the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the other Amendments.

The promise of this land and the ideals which we espouse is something my father, a WW2 and Korean War Vet, felt deeply about. A realist, he knew there were lots of problems; that we had not yet reached the goal of becoming “one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

There are other wars being fought today. Wars for our minds, our bodies and our habits. “Freedom isn’t free” as they say. Sacrifice is necessary to gain and keep freedoms. So, I salute, on this *New Memorial Day*, those who bear the brunt of sacrifice in my behalf.

Brigham Young’s promise to the Battalion was that they would be held in “honorable remembrance to the latest generation.” He then continued his promise, **but note that this next part was NOT specific to the Battalion:**

“I will prophesy that the children of those who have been in the army in defense of their county will grow up and bless their fathers for what they did at that time.”

It seems there is a special, multi-generational blessing pronounced upon all who serve; one that will turn the hearts of the children to their fathers.

To our daughter-in-law, Vanessa, to her children and to our son Christopher, we say a heartfelt, yet entirely insufficient “thank you” for your sacrifices and service. We pray this war ends honorably and soon, that good leaders will arise who will lead their people in peace and prosperity, but more importantly, in righteousness.

[Friday, September 12 – On the Cimarron Cutoff](#)

We’re now on the first of the “desert” crossings during which the Battalion had little water to drink. On this 50-mile stretch between the Arkansas and Cimarron rivers, they reported that they had to lie face down in a buffalo wallow in order to suck water through their teeth so they could slake their thirst. It took them two and a half days to make the distance.

In our case, we’re not short on water. It rained all night and continues as we hike during most of the morning. So, we put the support vehicle in 4-WD and slog through the wind, rain and sloppy roads making our average of 17 miles. The sky clears in the afternoon and things start to dry off.

We’re camped tonight at the home of Ken and Margaret Weidner. We share a pit cooked turkey dinner with a bunch of Weidner friends along. Ken is a reenactor who specializes in native American presentations. He’s put together a tipi with full accouterments – buffalo robes, point blankets, leather bead work, bows and arrows, painted leather bags using natural homemade paint pigments – all quite accurate and revealing a strong sense of history.

After dinner, the group is invited to the tipi where we sit around small council fire in the center. The flickering fire and shadows Outside, Ken’s horses walk and trot around, their hoofbeats further adding to the sense of historic realism. We talk about the Battalion story, local history and the state of the world. Along about 11 PM, we exit the tipi to a full moon surrounded by a rainbow ring seen through a light ground fog. It was magical.

To top the night off, Ken offers to let Denny and I spend the night in his tipi. This is a high honor and we readily accept. We move into the tipi with our buffalo robe, blankets and pillows. It’s a very cool night with a brisk wind that snaps the US flag posted beside our tent. The tipi door flaps quietly. An owl hoots, ending the day for us.

[Saturday, September 13 – On the Cimarron Cutoff](#)

It’s day two of our press through the Trek’s first “journada” between the Arkansas and Cimarron rivers. They had another 20+ mile day but we have difficulty getting our 17 miles completed.

We're invited to the home of Howard and Londa Koehn for breakfast. They've invited in a neighbor and brother Les. It's another chance to share the common themes of duty, sacrifice and devotion with folks. The Koehn's are Mennonites, a sect that has a long history of being misunderstood and persecuted. Very similar to the Mormon story in many aspects. It's a good time of sharing and we better appreciate the Mennonite background now.

The Koehn's property has a fairly large natural depression that has historically held water. Even with farming changes, it's still about three acres in size and could have easily held "thousands" of buffalo as described by the 1846 Battalion journalists when they talk about the wallow they drank from. I haven't checked the hiking distances to see if it's a potential match for their location, but it's one of the few large places that could be a Battalion used wallow.

After ten miles, we break for a lunch invitation with Daymon and Marilyn Yost, another Mennonite family. Their kids are out of the home and Marilyn loves to garden like Denny. They hit it off quite well. Lunch is pheasant, home produced veggies and yummy blackberry cobbler. Daymon shares his arrowhead collection experiences and we part about 2 PM to continue hiking.

It's a hot, dry and dusty day for us. We hike until 5 PM but don't get ahead of the schedule as we'd hoped. We need to hustle over to the home of Jim and Jan Groth north of Satanta, named after an Indian chief. They're hosting a BBQ for us with a bunch of invited friends that includes some of the folks we've already mentioned. The Groth's built an adobe house in the hacienda style. Very nice and they're kind enough to share the story with us. It's a comfortable time with lots of family and friends around. We're not the center of attention tonight, somewhat of a relief.

We put up a Battalion tent in the Groth's yard where we sleep the night away. It's very windy but we don't care. It's been a long, long day and we sleep just fine under the buffalo robe.

[Sunday, September 14 – Ulysses, Kansas](#)

Darlene and Max Groth invite us for breakfast. They're part of Jim's family and we have a casual morning talk around the table with folks who've lived in the area for generations. Three generations, to be exact. Their families settled the property and have kept it since. Roots are deep in the soil. They've run a number of successful businesses related to farming and pretty much roll with the punches as the economy changes. Survivors are tough people. They know how to work and we like them a lot.

We make church in Ulysses and then stop by the Grant County Historic Adobe Museum. We meet there with Jeff Trotman, local historian, reenactor, Santa Fe Trail National Board member and business owner. "My life is a wreck" says Jeff about his auto body business.

Jeff is helping us sort through the route in Grant County leading to Wagon Bed Spring – part of the Lower Cimarron Springs complex. It's here the Battalion camped on September 19, 1846 and we plan to arrive there on Tuesday. The night is spent at the Groth's home again, but we have to move all the vehicles tomorrow, so we call it quits "early" – about 11 PM.

[Monday, September 15 – North Fork of the Cimarron River](#)

We are almost done with this “journada” section across the dry plain between the Arkansas and Cimarron rivers. Between the two of us, Denny and I clocked an incredible thirty-one miles today – our longest yet.

It IS extremely flat here. Locals claim it’s the flattest county in the United States and that was before they leveled it so they could irrigate better back in the 1960’s. We’ve seen our first jackrabbits and magpies. One of the most astonishing items for me is that until today, we’ve daily had blue-jays scolding us as we hike. We appear to have finally left them behind. The area is also known for pheasant hunting with a number of “farms” that raise the birds for release.

The environment has also noticeably changed, becoming much drier. Historically the 100th line of longitude has been the line dividing the “wet” east from the “dry” west and our experience this week certainly supports this interpretation. The fields, the animals, the lack of clouds, the drier air all let us know that we have arrived at the great American Desert. Grass is much smaller with many bare spots between grass clumps. Here, it takes four acres of pasture to support a single cow.

Our stopping place is about where I think the Battalion camped. They said they went about a mile or so north of the Santa Fe trail to camp. This beautiful location isn’t open to the public. It’s in a small valley about a mile wide with a grove of trees along the dry branch of the Cimarron. Years ago (we’re told) the local 4-H club planted trees here. There’s a wagon route swale down the hill and into the river bottom – or at least, I think it’s a swell swale.

Rex and Lana Coleman will host us tonight. They’re “empty nesters” like Denny and I and we get to have a good time sharing life stories around a lasagna meal. What another unexpected treat for us. Good folks these two.

[Tuesday, September 16 – Lower Cimarron Springs, KS](#)

We’re actually one day ahead of our hiking schedule – nearly 24 miles by day’s end! We’ve decided to push ahead so we can attend a Santa Fe Trail seminar. More about that later in the week.

Sunrise is moving later each day and we start hiking now about 8 AM. Crystal clear blue skies with not a single cloud. As we hike the road, the Santa Fe Trail crosses. Again, we can see a slight ridge they likely followed.

For the second day in a row, we have some difficulties following our maps, getting slightly off course here and there by a mile or two. It’s easy to claim we’re the scouts and guards, hiking off to the side of the main Battalion body so it’s legitimate to claim that we’re still on “the route.”

Actually, let me make a couple observations about “hiking the trail.”

First, except for a few RARE instances, it’s difficult to ever say where the Battalion ever was with ultimate precision. That doesn’t bother me and I hope it doesn’t bother you. For me, it’s sufficient to know (within a few thousand feet) the general location of their route, camps, stopping places and things

they saw. If I hike close to that, I'm happy because, for the most part, one can get onto the "original" trails only with permission from the property owner.

For example; the Santa Fe Trail has the approved Auto Tour Route that lets one "follow" the Santa Fe Trail but sometimes is miles away from the original route. Does that constitute "following" the SFT? It depends upon your goals. For me, it wouldn't suffice to meet my goals for this Trek but for someone on a 2-week summer vacation and who only wants to hit the key locations along the SF Trail, it probably is good enough.

Secondly, the Battalion was often spread out – front to back and side-to-side. There were sentries and guards all around the group, trailing parties, scouts, guides and hunters all of whom were off the "trail."

So, if you think we're following a painted line on the ground, it just isn't so. Even among the Santa Fe Trail experts, there's lots of (ahem) "polite" disagreement about exactly how the trail developed and exactly where it went in any given year. And, the Battalion trail will be even less well defined in some spots as we go further west.

Arriving at the Lower Cimarron Springs area, I take to the fields (with permission) and check out some wagon rut swales in the area.

Later (like in the 1850's?) someone developed a more reliable water source by taking a wagon bed and sinking it in the sand to be a water trough. Think about Col Cooke's experiment with the laundry bucket at Cooke's Wells and you'll get the picture. Keeping sand from collapsing into your water hole is not an easy task. A wagon bed is big and provided a watering trough for a number of animals or people. So, this location is now known as "Wagon Bed Spring" – singular, because there was only ONE wagon bed watering trough.

However, there were more springs in the area and the Cimarron river bed could be dug in to obtain water. Hence, in earlier times (before the wagon bed innovation) the area was known as the Lower Cimarron Springs (plural) by which name I will generally refer to it since that is the name by which the Battalion would have known it.

There were a number of water seeps and opportunities for finding grazing grass for your cattle within a couple miles of the "official" spring location. Kansas has a beautiful set of aerial photographs made in 1939 that clearly show many wagon routes into and out of the area. There isn't ONE single spring/campsite at this area. Take your pick on which one the Battalion used. There just isn't enough information to determine with precision which one they used.

This evening, we're Jeff Trotman's guests at the 46th Annual Grant County Home Products Dinner. Each year, the locals celebrate the diversity of their agricultural efforts by holding a community dinner at which all the meal portions are locally grown – from the salad, to the meat and potatoes to the ice cream and cobbler dessert. The Chamber of Commerce has done a great promotional job and pulls in lots of folks from around the state. In fact, for a county of only about 6,500 souls, fully 1,500 attend the

\$5 per plate dinner that raises scholarship funds. And, did I mention that this was the 46th annual dinner?

Sitting across from us at the table was a gentleman who acted as the chief quality control engineer for the B-2 bomber production line. He couldn't tell us about the other projects he had worked on before retiring. Dang!

[Wednesday, September 17 – On the Cimarron River](#)

We move the vehicles, then hiked more, completing a 24-mile day at 4 PM. 'Twas hot, sunny and dry – but that's not the best part of our day.

For this evening, Jeff Trotman, our local Santa Fe Trail buff, reenactor and all-round miracle worker, pulled together a local event which was attended by about 75 folks. We held it at the Wagon Bed Spring historic site just about sundown.

Jeff lets me go first and I spend about 45 minutes telling about the Battalion and how their story resonates with the stories of the people we've met here in the past few days. It's that confidence/faith/trust idea that keeps maturing as I think about it more each day. Expressing my thoughts on this hasn't been easy yet, but it's improving.

Jeff then takes the "stage" and tells about Jedediah Smith, mountain man who was killed in the area in 1833. Weeks after Smith disappears on a scouting ride, his son's wagon train is in Santa Fe and sees some traders with his father's equipment. They relate that it was traded to them by some Indians who told of a fight between their chief and a white man. Both died from wounds but Jedediah's grave has never been found, if indeed the Indians buried him which isn't likely.

We met Ed Lewis whose grandfather paid for and used his horse drawn wagon in 1906 to bring three of the pink granite Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Santa Fe Trail markers from the railroad station at Ulysses to where they were placed. We've seen aplenty of these solid rock markers that indicate "the trail crossed here" but it hadn't struck me that in 1906 there really weren't many cars and few trucks that could haul these markers to their proper locations. Like the wagon trains that moved along the SFT, these markers had to make their final journey in a wagon similar to the ones they commemorate. It was a neat, goose-bump moment when that connection was made for me by Mr. Lewis.

[Thursday, September 18 – Larned, KS](#)

Today we took care of some pressing matters on the way back to Larned Kansas. Yep, you read that right. We're backtracking about 200 miles – by car – not walking.

"Why," you may ask, "are you returning to Larned?"

Well, that's because the Santa Fe Trail Association is holding their bi-annual "Rendezvous." It's a two day academic seminar, dedicated this year to the topic of "Freighting on the Santa Fe Trail." And we'll report

on the seminar which we've not attended before. Besides, we like Larned. There are some really nice folks here and at the Santa Fe Trail Center.

Our evening session at the Center was presented by Dr. Leo Oliva who spoke on the subject of food – one of my personal favorites. He spoke to what kinds of foods were available and consumed on the Santa Fe Trail. I owe him my list of over one hundred kinds of food mentioned by the Battalion journalists.

We're also happy to report that our new Spot GPS tracking unit has arrived. We will activate it and post our new tracking webpage address starting Saturday.

[Friday, September 19 – Larned, KS](#)

We have returned to Larned to attend the Santa Fe Trail Association's two day "Rondezvous" highlighting how freighting along the Santa Fe Trail evolved. For \$25 per person, it's more than worth the admission.

Today's sessions were:

1 – Introduction to and overview of freighting on the Santa Fe Trail (SFT). Harry Meyers gave a rousing synoptic overview of SFT freighting, the risks involved, the profits to be made and the cultural changes that occurred during the roughly fifty years of its' pre-railroad life.

2 – Early freighting (1821-1845) along the SFT. Michael Olsen stressed that commerce along the SFT was an early form of globalization. Cotton was grown in the south, shipped to England, manufactured into cloth which was shipped back to America, up the Missouri River, thence to Santa Fe and points south along various Mexican routes. Most were carried by entrepreneurs who took considerable risk to their lives to make a tidy profit.

3 – Army Freighting During the Mexican War (1846-48). Leo Oliva reviewed the Army's efforts to save money by hauling its' own equipment and food during the Mexican War. Despite tremendous improvements in procurement processes by the Quartermaster General's department, the government just can't do a job that the private sector can accomplish cheaper, better, faster. The Mexican War proved new supply tactics worked and that led to improved methods used during the Civil War.

4 – Hispano Culture and Transportation. Susan Boyle gave us some insights into the cultural changes wrought by the American conquest of Santa Fe and how that affected all aspects of life. She stressed that there are LOTS of documents undiscovered that will yield significant insights into SFT history, particularly the economic and financial relationships between speculative freighters, banks and producers of goods being shipped. (I think this was one of my favorite sessions)

The information density exceeded that of a neutron stars' surface. My head hurts. I'll transcribe my notes later. Someday. Not tonight.

[Saturday, September 20 – Larned, KS](#)

The new GPS tracker is online!

To follow our progress in “near real time” go to the following URL:

<http://share.findmespot.com/shared/faces/viewspots.jsp?glId=0xCzFkSrt4NDE2lxYk2y5qghNC7jJba4>

Save the link. You don't want to hand enter it – believe me.

Today's' events at the Rendezvous –

Wait – before I get to the sessions, may I praise some folks. Jeff Trotman has been a trooper in the Ulysses area and here at the Rendezvous. Thanks Jeff. We've caught up with Faye Gaines whom you will meet in a couple weeks and others along the route who have been helpers with our little hike. Most are intrigued by the Trek event and truly wish us well.

1 – Boom Times for Freighting on the Santa Fe Trail (1848-1866). Craig Crease gave a numbers dense review of how the Army needed ever increasing ability to move materials and food throughout the southwest. Cultural changes occurred as ever larger freighting companies took control through government contracts and prices fell for moving supplies. Economic uncertainty and speculation resulted in some dramatic business failures during this period. (Echos of this week's stock market, eh?)

2 – David Clappsaddle spoke about the eventual demise of freighting along the SFT as the railroad trailheads progressed further westward during the 1860's and 1870's. Consolidated freighting services eventually gave way to smaller, regional freighters who freighted what the trains couldn't yet reach.

3 – Panel discussion with Q&A from the audience.

4 – Demonstrations of frontier freight wagons (circa 1840's) at Fort Larned. On the parade square, we had a brand new, never before driven Army freight wagon drawn by a four-mule team. BEAUTIFUL! We had a “Pennsylvania Conestoga” style wagon capable of hauling 6,000-10,000 pounds of freight. This empty unit was drawn by just two very patient and beautiful red oxen. Finally, there was a passenger wagon pulled by a couple large draft horses (pardon, I don't know the breed). It was the first time since they restored the fort that they've had freighting wagons and animals on the parade grounds. This truly was a historic event and all we participants were very pleased. Lots of great photos taken by your reporter. Special thanks to the National Parks Service and Santa Fe Trail Center staff members who made it all possible

5 – Dinner. Steak, potatoes, corn, salad, cherry pie, good conversations with interesting people.

We escape the mosquito infestation (lots of rain lately – EAST of the 100th meridian) and make our way back to the hotel to complete our blog update, pack for tomorrow's return to the trailhead and hit the hay.

[Sunday, September 21 – Garden City/Ulysses, KS](#)

I'm posting Sunday's entry on late Saturday evening based upon our plans.

You see, it's unlikely we will have internet connectivity for quite a few days – perhaps not until we arrive at Santa Fe, so I'm going to make one last entry before we take off.

You can follow our updated position by going to the following URL:

<http://share.findmespot.com/shared/faces/viewspots.jsp?glId=0xCzFkSrt4NDE2lxYk2y5qghNC7jJba4>

Thanks for reading. Thanks for the encouragement and good wishes.

We plan to leave Larned about 8 AM for Garden City to attend church conference, then high-tail it back to Ulysses to spend time with our hosts, the Johnson's, whom we've stiffed for the past three days. We feel bad since they are a nice couple.

I remain YOS -

Ebenezer Brown, 2nd Sgt, Co A, Mormon Battalion
(aka - Kevin "Bud" Henson)

[Monday, Sept 22 – Cimarron Grasslands, KS](#)

This was one of our less exciting days of the Trek. It was a "moving day" for the trailers and because of the distances involved and needing to conduct some business, it took almost all day. Finally, in the afternoon we did get some quality hiking in and we'd like to share some about that.

The Cimarron Grasslands were developed after the Dust Bowl years. Many properties were abandoned or sold to the government and a strip of about 20 miles has been assembled into the longest government controlled section of the Santa Fe Trail. About 15 miles of it can be hiked.

Denny dropped me off at a trail head and I proceeded down (up?) the trail towards Santa Fe. For those of you keeping track, this is where they marched on September 21 and 22. They passed Middle Spring, described as a "bold spring" and camped a couple miles west of "Point of Rocks."

Due to the late start, I can't do the entire 15 miles and have to settle for about 5 miles today – but what a great five miles. It's the first stretch of land that is essentially as it was in 1846 and there's only one property owner to give permission – YOU!

The ruts are subtle in some locations, pronounced at others. The winds and water have removed evidence in lots of sections but the Santa Fe Trail Association and the National Park Service have put up limestone markers every quarter-mile or so to help hikers follow the route. There is no clearly defined hiking trail to follow because the area is used so infrequently.

There are lots of prickly pear cactus and a small specie of yucca that has really wickedly sharp spears that itch like crazy when they poke you. There's a hodge-podge of grasses, many of which don't appear to belong to our 1846 period, but with a limited budget, I suppose they're doing the best they can to preserve the trail. There is a "companion" trail – actually a dirt road that parallels the SFT off about a half-mile away, but I want the real rut experience today.

This is hard hiking for a few reasons: first, the trail isn't always clearly discernable. One has to stop and look around for the ruts, or if they're not visible, to look for the limestone post trail markers. Second, there are LOTS of prickly pear cactus and a small specie of yucca that has really wickedly sharp spears that itch like crazy when they poke you – and poke you they do. (I know I'm repeating myself, but you get the idea). Third, you really have to watch where you're putting your feet because of the cacti and grass roots being "clumpy" which will roll your ankles. Fourth, I'm always looking for good photo opportunities, so there are frequent stops to take pictures. And fifth, EVERYONE we meet warns us to watch out for rattlesnakes because, "This has been a BAD year for rattlers." Which leads to a certain paranoia since I'm hiking solo and in shoes that won't protect against snake strikes.

WARNING! Do NOT Hike Alone. EVER! Unless you've got plenty of backup and proper equipment – even then, it's kind of stupid to hike alone. But, necessity is the mother of dumb ideas, to wit:

Even though we have now hiked some 800 miles and seen only two live snakes (both non-poisonous) and only one dead rattler just last week, it was entirely predictable that on this particular stretch, when I'm alone and far from support, that I'd run into my first rattlesnake.

Yep – just about sundown, with the wind blowing my hat brim down so I couldn't see more than ten feet in front of me and when I look up to see where I'm going, the sun is directly in my eyes (remember, I am hiking west), that my blessedly good peripheral vision stands me in good stead once again. A slight motion about eight feet out on the ground stops me cold in my tracks.

It's a three-plus foot rattler that's NOT in the mood to rattle. He's just trying to get out of my way. I, of course, want a photo with my new buddy, so I use my "snake stick" broom handle to bring him back out of the deep grass



to where I can get a good shot of him – or maybe so he can get a good shot at me. Either way, I get my photos. Through it all he keeps a fairly good disposition and though he coils, he never strikes OR rattles.

WARNING! Do NOT mess with rattlesnakes, bison, cows or dogs. EVER!

[Tuesday, Sept 23 – Cimarron Grasslands, OK](#)

Today we get a fairly early start because we have some special things to go see and do. Denny hikes while I run catch some photos at Middle Spring and Point of Rocks. These are places the Battalion noted, though not by those names.

We've made arrangements to meet with the owner of a place called by various journalists as Cold Spring, Big Cold Spring or Cold Springs. This was a good water source in 1846 and we know the Battalion stopped here for the night. Exactly where on the property we don't know, but somewhere close at hand.

Another interesting fact about this site is that the water source has eroded out a sandstone wall. Because making graffiti is something ingrained in human nature (from the French cave murals to modern New York subways) we've come to see Autograph and Inscription Rocks.

The owner is kind enough to spend some time with us as we wander looking at the hundreds of names etched into the sandstone. Water erosion and vandalism has destroyed some, but there are many, many names here – a few famous, but most just normal people on their way somewhere who wanted to leave evidence behind that they came by this place. Some have Christian crosses by the name and speculation is that these are memorials to persons who died on the plains, buried in unknown graves and this wall being a place for friends to write their obituaries.

At Inscription Rock, I come up short as I spy the etching "L Dent." The assistant paymaster for the Battalion was one Lewis Dent. The name is etched eyeball high and is as clear as it can be, like it was begging to be noticed amongst the hundreds of other names. Goosebumps appear on my arms and I scramble for my cell phone to call Max Jamison of the modern Mormon Battalion Association. Max has done quite a bit of work on Dent and we hope to follow up on this potential connection with the 1846 march. No reception – so I just take pictures.

Not bad for a short hiking day and I want to remind our readers that the research is every bit as important as hiking. If we appear to be goofing off, let me assure you we are not.

[Wednesday, Sept 24 – Boise City, OK](#)

We get off early again and drive north to hike a short stretch of Colorado. It's our "token" part of the thirteen miles of the route in Colorado. Access to the Willow Bar crossing didn't get arranged so we drive as close as we can attempting to get photos. Sadly, all the roads are private ranch roads and we don't push our luck. We are trying to get access to other ranches to hike and see points of interest. These are VERY BIG RANCHES.

To quote Dorothy who said, "Toto, I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore" might be appropriate here. We move the trailers to Black Mesa State Park northwest of Boise City (pronounced like "voice" or Boyce) Oklahoma. Lots of antelope which the Battalion said were frequently sighted in their day, but the elk and buffalo are decidedly missing from the area in our time.

Happily, they have internet connections, so we'll be able to update y'all with our doings. We position the units, then drive off.

And so, mid-afternoon, we finally get to go hiking and do about twelve miles, all roadway but we're back on track and still on schedule even if we are burning some of our banked miles.

Speaking of banks – what is happening out there in the real world??? [KRH 2010; this was the first indication we had of severe financial problems with the mortgage/banking industry. As days progressed, we found most of our assets frozen and were within two weeks of having to abandon the hike. Happily, things got sorted out in time for us to continue.]

[Thursday, September 25 – McNees Crossing, NM](#)

We make a decent start in the morning and get along. Our route is west today and we are excited to see the "Rabbit Ears" mountain become a real mesa with two peaks rather than just a couple of blue bumps on the south-west horizon. We can see Sierra Grande to the west clearly and we realize we are coming to the end of the Great American Desert. Soon, we will be amongst the western peaks and climbing towards the continental divide.

We quickly exhaust our one county of Oklahoma and pass over into New Mexico. The ruts are just off the roadway and we "stair-step" the roads as they angle southwest towards the Rabbit Ears peaks. For lunch, I drive Denny over to McNees Crossing of the Canadian River. Don't ask me why a "river" this far south is named "Canadian." It's a mystery to me.

We open the gate (closing it behind us) and drive down to the river crossing. Denny and I hike down the eroded swale to the river bottoms and we talk about how the teams would have come down the hill from the east, turned to cross the flat, solid rock bottom shelf, then turned short to the left to climb up the steep, deep sand cut in the western side of the arroyo. With teams behind "blowing their horns" so to speak, the bedlam must have been astounding.

After leaving McNees, we ask permission to hike a private ranch and I get to go cross county for about five miles including a section of the Kiowa Grasslands. They are another unit of the National Grasslands like we were hiking the other day and all the same problems apply. Cacti, yucca, stickers. Ouch.

Again, I'm on my own, hiking solo out across rolling hills and gullies with just a few antelope and beeves in the fields. A bird of prey died near a stone marker, the skull having large orbital sockets for large eyes. No other trace remains and I'm not an ornithologist, so I don't know what kind, but suspect a hawk. I find an old snake skin, shed quite a while ago since it's falling apart. No sign of the former owner and inhabitant.

Still, it's with great pleasure that I cross a ridge to see the sun glinting off glass a few miles away. The binoculars are handy at times like these, so I verify it's Denny, then call her on the handheld radio. We talk and she can see me against the sky in my white shirt beside a ruined stone house. Since the day is getting on towards 5 PM, I start moving more quickly while still staying alert for potential dangers.

Near the end of the hike, I find a set of stone "stairs" – natural ledges a few inches high that make me think of Rocky Ridge in Wyoming. These ledges aren't as big or as long but they still presented a

challenge to the animals pulling the freight wagons, some weighing upwards of five tons – 10,000 pounds. The story of these pioneer trails is staggering in its complexity and scope.

As we drive back to the campsite, we come across an open cattle gate at McNees crossing – and yes, we did secure it as we left earlier in the day. Two yearlings are out, sampling the greener grass on the other side of the fence – and yes, it IS greener than the pasture they were in. But, not wanting the rancher to be miffed at Santa Fe Trail people who don't know how to do simple things like close gates, Denny and I turn cowpokes and herd the two waywards home. Then, off to a very late dinner and bed for us. The internet is finally up and I'll update tomorrow.

[Friday, Sept 26 – Cedar Spring, OK](#)

This morning we finally make contact with the ranch owner on which Cedar Spring is located. Though he's covering work for a friend, Alan takes time to drive us to this original Battalion camp location. There are tremendous trail swales that go for miles and we get some great photos of the camp area. It requires us to backtrack but the opportunity is rare and that we feel it's appropriate to spend the time documenting the area. Beautiful.

Our area of interest rests in a wide bowl a couple miles wide. Imagine a triangle-shaped mesa, pointed north with ravines on the east and west sides. The base is connected to the plains to the south. Off to the north, we can barely see Black Mesa on the horizon, sticking above the local topography. The area gently rolls from ridge to ridge – about fifty feet difference in top to bottom. We find a couple areas sufficiently large enough to camp the Battalion's wagons and tents and the buffalo grass has been helped by a recent rainstorm.

What is most delightful about this location is to walk to the western side of the triangle mesa to be met by a view of a small creek bed lying between the rock outcrops. The ravine is a couple hundred yards wide completely covered with lush green grass and plenty of water. It extends northward for nearly a mile before we lose sight of it among the turns and twists of the canyon. The scene is truly breath-catching with the greens, tans, reds, blacks and blues we see.

After we've satisfied ourselves, we hop in the car and head back – but I manage a wrong turn and we quickly become semi-disoriented. For those of you who haven't had the experience of being lost on the open prairie without many landmarks to guide you, I must admit it is semi-disconcerting. But, we do a Hansel and Gretel thing and eliminating wrong roads by process of elimination. In other words, we get home in the early afternoon.

Back at the trailer, we finish working on a number of pressing items, pack up and prepare to head to Grenville NM but decide to go to Clayton where we can have some more support facilities. We try to get some gas in Kenton, only to find the station has closed. Dang! It was a close thing.

[Saturday, Sept 27 - Clayton, NM](#)

Today's efforts will be to locate and document three Battalion campsites and obtain photos of the route through the area. We move the RV trailer, unhook the Jed Clampett Memorial Port-a-potty Trailer and head off into the wilds. During the day we see at least one hundred antelope.

There won't be any hiking in today as we expect to drive nearly 200 miles to find these locations. Now, normally, this wouldn't take too long, but we're on gravel backroads which we haven't driven before and for which maps are ... well, ... not the most reliable. Much of my route planning was done with commercially available routing software and the names/numbers they use for these local roads don't appear to coincide with the local numbering/naming.

For example; County Road A-005 (software name) isn't on ANY signposts. Instead, the road is named Campbell Road, so there isn't a one-to-one correspondence for these maps making navigation difficult. Plus, often there isn't much difference between the county road and the rancher's private roads. Some of these guys carried loaded rifles to discourage cattle rustling.

Stop number one is along the Alamos Creek where I take some photos of a stone corral (more about that next week) and the streambed which is also lush with grass and water. Everyone tells us this is highly unusual for September but we're grateful. Highs are upper 80's today.

Stop number two is a trail crossing and stop number three is the Battalion's campsite for September 28.

We take lots of photos along the route and about sundown get to the last campsite we want to find. As we crest a ridge, below us is a broad valley about a mile wide. Here again, there's enough water to support verdant green grasses and the area could easily hold a few thousand head of oxen, mules and cattle. A few ranches dot the valley and there's a second, side valley that gives the area its modern name of "Extra Valley." We wind down the hill into the area and find an area with rock corrals and other ruins.

On our way back to blacktop, we come through the old settlement of Farley New Mexico. Someone is restoring the old yellow and green painted train station and there is an old ranch house that's being used for cattlemen. As the sun sets, we get a few final photos and we start homeward. We drive for about twenty miles without seeing a single residence light.

[Sunday, Sept 28 – east of Springer, NM](#)

(Oct 12 - Sorry for the delays in posting. We've been in digital la-la land again for two weeks. krh)

We attended church in Raton and then beat it back to Clayton so we can move to our next campsite

Our camp tonight is a ranch belonging to Faye Gaynes, a Santa Fe Trail Association member, chapter president and national board member. Faye is someone we've traded phone calls with for nearly a year and who we finally met in person at the Larned "Rendezvous" a couple weeks ago.

Faye is owner of the Point of Rocks Ranch about 15 miles east of Springer. It sits in a small valley at the bottom of the mesa known to all SFT travelers. It's a beautiful area, sitting in a small bowl-shaped valley. There's not a single house light to be seen from her front porch.

Her friends Barbara and Francis are over as we arrive in the late afternoon. We trade small talk and backgrounds, laugh at the funny things we all do (I promised Faye I wouldn't give details), share trail stories and route information. We finally call it a day about 11 PM and head for bed.

[Monday, Sept 29 – east of Springer, NM](#)

Today, Denny starts the wash and camp chores while I hike to the top of Hogback Ridge above Faye Gaynes ranch. From the descriptions left by Levi Hancock and the other journalists, one cannot be completely sure where the "altar" upon which he offered his "Three Friends" prayer of October 2, 1846 is located. He says it was on "the highest peak" of the mesa. And, he and his buddies didn't get back to the main column until about 2 PM in the afternoon. It must have been some hike to his location. So, off I go looking for something that may or may not be there.

From the east, as the Battalion approached this location, the Point of Rocks has three distinct peaks; there's the lowest southern peak, the highest peak called the Hogback in the middle, and a medium height part of the mesa on the north. Looks kind of like an Olympic awards stand.

Anyway, my suspicion is that Levi's prayer stone is at the top of the Hogback peak. But just to hedge my bets, I clamber up the southern extension of the mesa and photograph the two rock cairns (piles of stones) that are the "traditional" location for the prayer.

Shortly after noon, we're finished with our cleaning and exploring, Denny pushes me off into the blazing afternoon sun and I begin following the wagon swales westward – snake stick in hand.

Before going a full mile from the ranch, I pass a pile of rocks that are obviously meant to mark something. Is it a grave of some unfortunate trail traveler? I can't tell and when I ask Faye later, she isn't sure what the pile represents. Perhaps someone will pursue this someday.

The swales are fairly evident, about six inches deep with small ledges as they erode back into the soft sands in the area. Every so often, the trail becomes faint to my untrained eyes and I have to start wandering back and forth to see if I can find it. Wisely, I sight in on the direction the trail is headed so if I lose the swales, I just keep heading in the general direction and pretty soon they become visible again.

It's very quiet here. It's very lonely – but not a morose lonely. It's the kind of solitude that either makes you crazy because you aren't able to be alone with yourself or is comforting because there aren't many distractions. Just to wander the trail, looking for animals, checking the sky, listening to sounds is a kind of lonely the mountain men must have enjoyed. I know I do. I'm not an "escapist" – but I'm perfectly at ease being out here without anyone else around for miles. It amazes me more people aren't comfortable doing things like this.

About 4 PM, we drive to check another location to check out some ruins noted in the Battalion journals, catch some photos to share later and move the trailer forward to our next campsite where we're going to give a presentation at 6:30 PM. Folks from the Raton LDS congregation – about 35 - drive out to hear something about the Battalion. We pledge allegiance to the flag and I launch into my overview of the Battalion, but tonight I also focus on stories pertaining to the local area. As the sun sets, I remind the folks that Levi Hancock had sketched the Rocky Mountains west of us and counted over sixty-five peaks he could see. It's been quite a week going from the high plains to the foothills of the Rockies. Quite a week.

The Milky Way is so bright tonight that we can easily see in the dark without using flashlights. I cannot imagine how the ancients could come up with all the constellations with a dark sky because there are so many more stars visible that the sky gets cluttered, drowning out the patterns we think of.

It's starting to feel like fall and there's a definite chill to the night air. We sleep in the 1846 tent, set up on the very edge of the Santa Fe Trail ruts and pull the buffalo robe over us to keep warm.

[Tuesday, Sept 30 – Springer, NM](#)

Whoo-hoo! Another wonderful day for Denny and I. About ten miles in original ruts without a guide to show the way. Last night, Bob Gillespie told me that, "You won't have ANY trouble following the trail." And dang if it wasn't true. The swales were so distinctive; there were only three times I had to go wandering to find it.

Along the way I see our daily hawk. Every hiking day except one we have seen a hawk since we started on July 5th. I also scare up a coyote and a couple jackrabbits.

We finally run out of permission to hike private property as we intersect the highway east of Springer but we do get permission to drive to the "Rock Crossing" of the Canadian River. After a false start down the wrong road, we backtrack and find the crossing. It's at the base of a mesa and crosses an expanse of sandstone that is fractured into large blocks and eroded into fantastic surface patterns.

The trail comes down around the south side of the mesa. The wagons had to cross to the west side across these interesting rocks because upriver is sandy while downriver is a canyon that prevents crossing. It's a definite location the Battalion was at and they camped closeby on the west side.

For the evening, we pack everything over to Springer and camp in the parking lot of the county museum. Denny and I have to work into the early morning catching up on business matters, correspondence and map out some hiking options for the week.

A note here: When we are on our own and don't have other people participating with us – either hiking or a special event planned, we sometimes hike long or short or go do some local research if appropriate.

IF YOU INTEND TO VISIT US AT CAMP, PLEASE CALL AHEAD TO LET US KNOW. But be aware, we are frequently out of cell phone range. Plan early.

989-493-5147 or 989-708-1504

October 2008

[Wednesday, Oct 1 – Wagon Mound, NM](#)

We hike down to Wagon Mound along the frontage road of I-25. It's the best we can do today since we've not been successful in contacting the property owners along the original trail. Still, it's quite lovely. Today was a big day – 21 miles from Springer to Wagon Mound and yes, Wagon Mound does look like a wagon being pulled by oxen - if you have a good imagination or poor eyesight.

The Ocate (pron: OH-kah-tay) Creek is where the Battalion was divided into two groups; the stronger men rushed ahead to Santa Fe, arriving only the day before General Kearny had set to discharge the Battalion if they hadn't arrived. Most of the remaining men arrived three days later on October 12. Lt. Andrew Jackson Smith showed excellent leadership qualities by making this command decision and thereby keeping the Battalion enlisted – an important consideration for both the Mormons and General Kearny a few months later.

When Denny and I drove out to Ocate Creek, we did so under the impression the SFT creek crossing was visible from a county road. Not so. It's on private property and the owner is quite adamant that no visitors are allowed. In fact, I was soundly scolded by the ranch manager who chased us down as we were leaving.

Now, lest it seem I'm complaining about this incident, I'm not. The gentleman was completely in the right and I was completely in the wrong. The sad thing is the roads are not marked well in the area and one is not always sure if they are on public or private lands. I'm quite embarrassed to have made the mistake. I even offered to delete the photos, but he was kind enough to let me retain them.

[Thursday, Oct 2 – Watrous/Las Vegas, NM](#)

We spent last night in the parking lot of a closed restaurant at Wagon Mound. We were just a few yards from the railroad tracks and three very loud trains pass in the night. Yawn.

We again follow the frontage road of I-25 south towards "La Junta" or, as it is now known as Watrous. This is the great confluence of Santa Fe Trail routes: the Mountain Route from Bent's Fort connects to the Cimarron Cutoff here at Watrous. While the town isn't impressive the history is.

As we hike in the early afternoon, the clouds start building and eventually start raining. But out here in the dry foothills of the Rockies, the rain frequently evaporates before it reaches the ground – or at least most of it evaporates. This leads to some interesting weather phenomenon. For instance: the rain starts out very heavy and dark as it falls from the cloud, but gets more transparent as it gets closer to the ground. One can easily see mountains and clouds in the distance while looking through the falling rain. There's also quite a bit of lightning – as was the case today. If it stays in the distance (say ten miles or so) I don't worry too much. But, when the flash is promptly followed by the peal of thunder, it's time to stop hiking and get off the road – which we do about 2 PM.

As luck would have it, we are very close to the Fort Union road where we are expecting to pick up some correspondence from the Bureau of Land Management. So, rather than just sit in the car and wait for the storm to pass, we motor over to Fort Union and pick up our mail.

Fort Union was established in the 1850's and became the main supply depot for the Santa Fe Trail. While Fort Larned's buildings have been restored and are in beautiful shape, Fort Union's adobe buildings have all but disappeared due to the rain. What remains is very impressive and the interpretive work done by the Park Service still gives a good understanding of how important this location was during the Trail's heyday.

It's another late night and we finish about 11 PM after having supper at a national pizza chain store. Campsites are hard to come by these days because Albuquerque is having the annual balloon festival. There's a LOT of people who show up for this thing and we've been seeing lots of campers headed southwest for the past week.

A word about our hike plans: There isn't a frontage road between Watrous and Las Vegas (NEW MEXICO – not the other one!), so we drive ahead and park the trailers at Vegas. In the morning, we'll be on our way to Santa Fe to participate in a special event this weekend then drive back to Vegas to continue the Trek.

[Friday, Oct 3 – On the road to Santa Fe](#)

We're not hiking today, Instead, we're driving forward to Santa Fe so we can participate in the Harvest Festival at the Rancho de los Golondrinas (Ranch of the Swallows). More about the Rancho later in this entry.

But first, there's catch-up work. We take the Suburban to the dealer for some brake work and an oil change, get a tire repaired and park the big rig at a truck stop. We will drive the "Henski Truck" which is filled with all our good camping/reenacting stuff to Golondrinas. Denny has packed our clothes and hygienic supplies into tubs which we load and then vamoose. On the way to Santa Fe we check out some possible campsites for next week. Finally, we arrive in Santa Fe about 2 PM to pick up a friend.

Peter Guilbert, whom you may remember, hiked the very first day out of Council Bluffs with us, has returned from California for more punishment. Yep, he's going to hike with us for two weeks or more, all the way into Albuquerque.

It's a hectic day because we've been out of "civilization" for so long there are lots of things we need to do and purchase. My cell phone has died and needs replacement. Selecting a new cell phone is tantamount to pulling my wisdom teeth. I also managed to drop a CB radio somewhere on Point of Rocks so we need a new set of those little beggars. There go my canine teeth. Being in a "big box" store for the first time in nearly three months is jarring but not too disconcerting. I'm adaptable. But the really big screen TV's mesmerize me.

Denny goes grocery purchasing because we will have period cooking while at Golondrinas. Finally, we're off to the Rancho, southwest of town along El Camino Real. Nope, I didn't get ahead of myself there

folks. The Spanish developed a number of Camino Real's – Royal Roads, approved by the King. Most of us know about the one in California linking the Catholic Missions but there were others and perhaps this most important Camino Real extended from Mexico City all the way to Taos New Mexico.

The Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (Royal Road from the Interior) dates back to 1598. The Battalion followed a portion of it as they worked their way south from Santa Fe along the Rio Grande. Golondrinas lies astride el Camino Real de Tierra Adentro and it's entirely possible [probable] the Battalion passed right by this ranch as they left Santa Fe.

We're here by invitation to participate in the Harvest Festival and to present information about the Battalion. Mike King is the Interpretive Director and has made arrangements for us. We meet Mike for the first time as he introduces us to the Rancho, shows us around and lets us know about our part of the program.

I will not describe Golondrinas tonight, but will give more details in another entry, but for now, perhaps it will suffice to tell you that the Rancho is a "living history" village of about 200 acres with a volunteer staff of reenactors and docents that exceed 200 in number. It is VERY impressive and I'm humbled to be here representing the Battalion and its history.

We make our way down to our campsite and set our two tents. Shortly we're joined by a local reenactor who will be in our group – Mark Cummins. Mark is part of the New Mexico Volunteers, a Civil War group that has agreed to help us out this weekend. We'll be joined by others tomorrow, but the four of us get to bed at a reasonable hour since tomorrow will be very busy all day.

[Saturday, Oct 4 – Rancho Golondrinas, Santa Fe, NM](#)

We're up and at it early preparing breakfast and getting our "non-period" bedding put away before guests arrive starting at 10 AM. The other area reenactors arrive; Mike Bilbo, Blaine Bachman, Tony Campisi and Dave Poulin from the New Mexico Volunteers. Ron Kirkpatrick, an Albuquerque resident also joins us. Ron is helping make plans for us down in that area.

At 11 AM, the Education Center building (modern in every way except for the exterior) is the setting for my lecture about the March of the Mormon Battalion. About 70 people show up and after a quick introduction about the Trek, I launch into a 45 minute presentation using computer graphics and photos – background of the Battalion, what happened, its importance and the connection to the area.

In the afternoon, Denny puts on a cooking demonstration as she prepares our authentic Mormon Battalion Stew with Bread menu. One delight for us is that Golondrinas has three working grist mills. They actually grind the wheat they grow onsite into flour of various degrees of fineness. They "bolt" – or separate - the flour using screens of different size openings, so there is coarse to fine flours made during Harvest Festival. We are given a supply of freshly ground wheat – and I mean freshly ground – as in right from the grinding stones and collection box at the mill just one hundred yards from our campsite.

Those who have read the journals may remember the Battalion didn't seem impressed by grist mills they saw along the Rio Grande. From our introduction here at Golondrinas to the local technology, they

didn't appreciate the complexity and inventiveness of the local engineers. These mills, dating from the 1850's are worthy of our admiration. They are fantastically simple, have multiple feedback systems to keep them regulated and can be left essentially unattended once set up and started. A local expert has identified more than four-hundred of these along the Rio Grande valley from records.

As Denny is working at the food preparation table, a group of about seven girls and boys gather around to watch, so Denny puts them to work cutting vegetables grown right here at Golondrinas, mixing the flour and other tasks that can be done by the kids. They spend nearly a half hour helping. The parents are busy talking to the reenactors and everyone is having a pretty good time. A reporter spends the entire afternoon interviewing various members of the group. Dozens of people wander through camp. Whenever someone checks out our tent, I encourage them to feel our buffalo robe bedding or even lie on it for a short nap.

"Living history" events like this bring together people who love history enough to demonstrate it with those who have rarely thought about how our societies and cultures got to be where they are. This blending of past and present is both enjoyable for those of us who "do" reenacting and for those who come to our camps to touch the past.

The stew starts bubbling and the rolls start browning in our dutch ovens at campfire. Sadly, the Rancho closes to the public at 4 PM and the kids are really disappointed that they can't stay for dinner with us. Of course, that means there's more for us. Yumm. The rolls are very dark brown and quite heavy compared to white flour rolls. Butter and honey help improve an already great bread. And the stew has all fresh veggies with faux-buffalo stewmeat.

Late in the afternoon, the humidity starts to build and clouds gather in the northwest. We hurry to put things away because the forecast is for rain overnight. Peter, Mark and I quickly finish, then drive over to the LDS church to watch General Conference from Salt Lake City. Another "timequirk" – dressed in 1800's clothing watching a satellite broadcast from hundreds of miles away. Denny uses the time to have her own timequirk by going to the Laundromat to get the wash done.

A couple hours later, we find the cold front has arrived and a steady rain has begun. As we return to Golondrinas, we duck into the tents, get into our jammies and bed down for the night. All night long, the rain gently falls, tapping on the canvas tent and helping us soundly sleep after a very busy day.

[Sunday, Oct 5 – Rancho Golondrinas, Santa Fe, NM](#)

Oy! It rains ALL night long – and quite a bit of rain for New Mexico. In fact, it rains so much that this day of Harvest Festival is cancelled for only the second time in thirty years. The parking lot is a mud pit and Golondrinas lies on a narrow two-lane road. There is no other place to put vehicles. The sun comes out about 9 AM, but the damage is done. Everyone is very sad.

Since Golondrinas is a 1700's Spanish Colonial period rancho, its ties to the Catholic Church and traditions are very strong. There are three small chapels onsite.

Each year during Harvest Festival, the Archbishop for Santa Fe attends to perform Mass and accept the “first fruits” of Golondrinas harvest. A procession of all the various artisans, workers and farmers were to join in as the Archbishop led the participants to the chapel for Mass – another act and expression of faith by those who respect the tradition and its deeper meanings.

We were looking forward to participating in this service, to experience a many generations old tradition at this place where some of the volunteers are descendants of the original settlers and owner families. But sadly, the unusual amount of rain has made it necessary to cancel the procession.

Mike King, the director of the event, is greatly disappointed as are all the volunteers. But, Mike asks if I will conduct an impromptu repeat of yesterday’s presentation about the Battalion for the volunteers. So, we quickly set up the computer and at 10 AM, we are into reruns. Over 75 staff members attend and there are some great questions.

As we finish up, Mike takes the podium and tells the staff that despite the sign saying the Festival is cancelled, people are still coming to the gates and asking to come in since the weather has cleared. Mike asks if the staff is willing to open and conduct as much of the remaining activities as they can get in. Of course, being history ‘teachers’ they all readily agree with big smiles on their faces.

We all hustle to our assigned positions and happily meet the future while dressed and steeped in history of the past.

Among Eighteenth Century demonstrators and skills represented at Golondrinas were (and my apologies to the staff if we missed any): basket weavers, bakers, millers, tanners, tallow making, laundry washing, grinding sorghum into molasses, tortillas, grape stomping into juice, use of the lariat, apple cider making, candle making, sheep shearing, sheep herding, cooking in hornitos, silversmithing, blacksmithing, dancers, fashion shows and local artists selling their materials.

It is quite likely the Battalion passed this special place where we can again touch our common history.

To those reading this blog, may I heartily endorse el Rancho de las Golondrinas as an opportunity to learn more about the Battalion by learning about the world through which they moved and lived. If you are in the area and the Rancho is open, you should make it a point to visit. For more information, go to their website at:

<http://www.golondrinas.org/>

Oh, and today marks three months since we left Mt. Pisgah Iowa.

[Monday, Oct 6 – Tecolote, NM](#)

Last night we drove back from Santa Fe to Las Vegas. This morning, we arise and beat it down to the Chevy dealership to pick up the Suburban and the Jed Clampett Memorial Trailer. Alas, the trailer has two flat tires – and one is a new tire. So, we get them inflated enough to drive to a tire repair business. An hour later, we’re back at the trailer rearranging everything we moved around before leaving for

Golondrinas. Peter, Denny and I start hiking about 11 AM – a very late start, but it’s a short distance day, only about 14 miles scheduled to get us to Tecolote (prn: Tech-OH-Low-tee).

Las Vegas, being the first sizable town the Battalion reached after leaving Fort Leavenworth, has some history we want to document before we leave, so we stop into the Historical Society building and chat it up with the two staff members present. Some photos and maps help us better understand the local roads and route the Battalion took through this town. Las Vegas in early 1846 was the “port of entry” into Mexican territory and the Santa Fe traders had to stop for inspection and to pay their business taxes before proceeding. The American invasion stopped all that.

Today, we ascend into the Rockies and finally leave the high plains behind. It was just over two weeks ago that we caught sight of the Rabbit Ears, our first mountain and now, we’re among them, surrounded on all sides and climbing quickly from 4,000 feet up to Santa Fe at 7,000 feet later this week.

We follow the route through Kearny’s Gap (Puertocito or “little portal” in those days) where Kearny’s troops thought they were going to have a fight. Lt. Emory describes their preparations and eventual disappointment at not finding any Mexican defenders at the gap. We find a set of deeply eroded wagon ruts going southwest into the mountains. Perhaps I should mention that we are using Marc Simmons “Following the Santa Fe Trail” as a primary source for our hike in this section. He’s right on with his descriptions.

Peter’s ancestors were Moses and Edward Wade, a father & son team that volunteered for Company C. Peter reenacts in California with the Sierra-Nevada Mormon Pioneers group. They primarily present in central California and western Nevada. They attend Gold Discovery Day at Coloma (January), Traders Fair at Sutter’s Fort near Sacramento (April), Columbia Diggin’s near Sonora California (June) and Gold Rush Days at Old Town Sacramento (Labor Day weekend). In all, they present at nearly forty events each year.

See their full schedule and information at their website: www.1846history.com

Peter takes the last leg of hiking for today while Denny and I move the trailers to our camp. We’re a full day and a few extra miles ahead of our schedule – a nice situation to be in, especially since the original Battalion was really moving along in their rush to reach Santa Fe.

Camp tonight is a truck stop parking lot at Romeroville. Almost all the RV camp areas are full due to the Balloon Festival at Albuquerque, some 100 miles away and the ones that aren’t full are charging upwards of \$50 per night – too steep for our liking, so we go off-roading.

[Tuesday, Oct 7, San Miguel, NM](#)

Sunrise gets us out of bed for a quick breakfast of chorizo eggs. We must be in the southwest. As we pack up to leave, we notice that this is our first morning with frost on the vehicles. It’s definitely chilly as we begin the day, but the sun comes up strong and we have a glorious morning.

We drive back to where Peter finished hiking yesterday, jump out and pick up the pace again. We're stuck on frontage roads pretty much until we turn off on NM Highway 3 for San Miguel but even with that, let me say that today was one of the prettiest days we've had so far. Weather was beautiful, the mountains were dramatic creams, reds and the foliage is starting to get serious about fall. Cottonwoods are turning yellow, the junipers/cedars are bright green, the sky deep blue and breezes are cool.

San Miguel was the original Mexican "port of entry" for the Santa Fe Trail and one of the communities the Battalion passed through. The main group in advance camped northwest of the town after crossing the Pecos River and the Catholic church on its plaza.

John Steele wrote his memoirs later in life and described his entrance into San Miguel on October 11, 1846. He remembered that:

"We soon went on through great forests of cedar wood, scrubby, soon came to San Miguel where the ladies were on the top of the house, and when they saw that I had women in my wagon they hastened down and sent their old father to invite us in. This old gentleman lived opposite the Catholic Chapel and attends to services when the regular priest is absent. So when he came and invited us I gave him to understand I would. Then when my women got out of the wagon there was such a hugging as I had never seen before, as that is their manner of saluting. I left my cattle and went into the house and on entering there was a large picture of the Savior on the Cross. As soon as I saw it I made the sign of the cross on my breast. Then the old Spaniard took me by the hand as if I had been his long lost brother."

Peter and I walk a few hundred feet down the curving rocky lane east of the church to the river and pause at the Pecos River crossing. It's flowing fairly fast, fairly clear, has some deep spots but in general is about two feet deep and twenty feet wide. There's a cut-down on the west bank and the only rocky shallow area for at least a hundred yards up or downstream. This surely is where Peter's ancestors marched across the Pecos into San Miguel. The animals, wagons and men all crossed here on their way. Sadly, the church is closed and we don't have the opportunity to enter.

Our campsite tonight is Villanueva State Park, ten miles down canyon from San Miguel along the Pecos River. It's a beautiful camp – off the beaten path and a well kept secret campsite, so there are few Balloon campers here. There's a deep canyon, reminding us of Zion's in Utah. The Pecos River flows next to the campsites and has sufficient water to make enough noise to remind you that water does exist in this place.

After a nice supper, I walk along the county road and collect prickly pear cacti fruits. I'm intrigued by the possibility of making a pie using the fruits. Sundown is spectacular and above us floats a lone helium balloon with a single passenger. We can only speculate if it's from Albuquerque.

[Wednesday, Oct 8 - near Pecos, NM](#)

Today, we push on to stay ahead on our hiking. We've decided to get to Santa Fe on Friday instead of Saturday. We move the trailer ahead to Santa Fe, then drive back to San Miguel to hike.

Peter and I go off-road following access roads from San Miguel to San Jose. We spot a couple boulders that have cracks filled with native silver. Sadly, they're too big to take with us.

Though we can't hike on the private property, we're paralleling the original trail for miles and frequently we can see eroded remnants close to us. In some areas, property owners are trying to slow the erosion, but realistically, it's a lost cause because the gullies are so deep. Headward erosion will continue to cut the ruts away until there's only a wide gully to mark the passage of thousands along the trail.

There's a delightful coincidence between the 1846 group and our Trek today. They noted that as they came into the Rockies, some of the peaks were covered with snow. The storm we had last week while at Goldrinas put down some snow on the high peaks north of Santa Fe and we are able to see them off and on all day as we wend up canyon. So, we're paralleling some of their weather experiences as well as the trail experiences. We think that's kind of neat.

At San Jose, we follow the old route along a county road until it dead ends. Lots of the old route is covered by I-25, the railroad or an old highway that predates the interstate. Returning to the frontage road, we continue hiking enjoying the scenery and swapping stories about our respective lives. That's probably what original Battalion members did as they hiked along and I stand by that opinion.

For the remainder of the week, we will camp in Santa Fe and will commute to our hike site or activity locations. Denny's dad, Jerry Watts, has returned to us. Along are Jerry's sister Pat, her husband Gayle and Jerry's wife DaNece. They're going to hang with us for the remainder of the week. It's a welcome visit by family and we're glad to see them all.

[Thursday, Oct 9, - Glorieta Pass & Apache Canyon, NM](#)

Leading towards the town of Pecos which we didn't quite reach yesterday, we gradually diverge from I-25 and ruts appear in fields beside the road. We get into the National Park and Peter gets to hike original trail. He's an experienced outdoorsman and quickly recognizes how to spot the swales. Denny comes up and takes a bunch of photos of us with snow covered mountains as background.

Denny, Peter and I arrive at the Pecos National Historical Site where the ruins of a large pueblo and Catholic church are the attraction. The Battalion journalists have confusing stories about how old it was, who built it, what it meant, but we get the true scoop from the Rangers.

The second church, built in the early 1800's and which are the ruins we see today was half the size of the older 1600's chapel and is only 100 feet front to back. It had been abandoned just nine years before the Battalion passed through, yet it was substantially ruined and later the rocks, timbers and furnishings were scavenged to build settler homes and ranches in the area.

To the north of the church were the pueblos, whose inhabitants the Catholic fathers came to convert. These housed upwards of 2,000 persons, stretched for nearly a half-mile along a strategically located hill with water, fields and other resources nearby. Research shows it was a regionally important trade location and may have been one of the earliest major pueblos. The reconstructions are impressive and like so much else associated with the history of this Trek, must be seen with the imagination.

As we are about to leave Pecos, a photographer from the Albuquerque Journal's Santa Fe regional office catches up with us. Eddie talks to us for awhile to catch the flavor of what we're doing, then follows us back out to the ruts we walked earlier this morning. Peter and I re hike about a quarter-mile of the trail so Eddie can capture some shots with a more natural 1800's background rather than a highway.

The article can be found at: <http://santafe.com/pages/1924> <broken link>

Finally, about 2 PM, we get serious about the day's hiking. Denny goes a few miles stretch by herself while Peter and I cross Glorieta Pass into Apache Canyon. We can't hike I-25, so we leave it to you to figure out how we made it down canyon. Very little of the way can we see original trail as the railroad and I-25 road construction has erased much. We do pass some of the Civil War battlefield. Yep, the War of Northern Aggression made it all the way out here to New Mexico.

Peter and I are having so much fun with the scenery, history and hiking that I miss the turn-off back to the roads. We hike another three miles beyond the planned distance and come out quite fatigued. Denny expected to meet us at another exit and we're late, so she's been calling on the phone, radios and driving up and down the canyon. We get back into range just about sundown and we rejoin the family back at the trailer for a late dinner.

[Friday, Oct 10 – Santa Fe, NM](#)

To start this auspicious day, we backtrack by car to where we stopped hiking last night and survey the south end of Apache Canyon. The books say the Santa Fe Trail climbed along the face of some hills on the west side, but we can't see them from NM Highway 300, the frontage road to I-25. So, we do an end-run north to Old Santa Fe Trail Road and follow it down canyon to its end where we start hiking. The road climbs along a ridge and off to our left the original trail follows the valley bottom.

In the eastern states, trails generally avoid streambeds except at crossings, but since water so infrequently flows in this area, sandy streambeds become logical routes for travel. They are basically flat and if larger rocks and boulders are removed, wagons can easily travel along the valley bottoms which doesn't require ascending to the ridgelines. Peter and I join up with Denny again and we all three hike sections as we approach Santa Fe.

At 3 PM, Peter and I, in full uniform, packs and gear march towards the Plaza along the same route followed by the Battalion. Peter leads with the US flag while I trail carrying my musket. We make a pretty small parade, but Peter notes that people are much more respectful towards us as we follow the flag compared to when we are just hiking along looking like a couple of seedy characters.

We are met by Larry Ogan a local LDS member and reporter for the New Mexican newspaper out of Albuquerque. They run some photos as we hike into the Plaza.

We march to the center of the Plaza, halt, then go to "at ease." During the hour we spend on the Plaza, about 30 people approach us to learn what we're doing and have their photos taken with us. We express our appreciation to some veterans for their service and swap military stories from different ages.

The rest of the family arrives (late) and we are treated to a photo op in the Palace of the Governors courtyard. We get to walk the hallways where General Kearny, Alexander Doniphan, Sterling Price and Battalion officers conferred. Manuel Armijo and other notable Mexican or Spanish Governors lived and worked here for generations before the Battalion arrived. Out front is the portico under which St George Cooke, after a very long day riding into Santa Fe and after mounting the guard for the city, took his saddle, placed it on the ground and promptly fell asleep using the saddle as his pillow.

We're quite pleased with our Trek accomplishments so far. We've arrived at Santa Fe after three months of hiking, on schedule and without any major difficulties. We've made many connections with interested people, conducted some basic research and hope to contribute to the storehouse of Battalion heritage. Our only regret today is that the Spot tracking units' batteries weren't up to the task so our final approach and arrival isn't documented for those who wanted to track us. But, we're safely here in old Santa Fe and count ourselves blessed.

[Saturday, Oct 11 – Santa Fe, NM](#)

Remember how we hustled our bustle all last week to get ahead in our hiking schedule? Well, one would assume we'd splurge by sleeping in on our "day off," But, no! We decide to get up before the crack of dawn and drive to Albuquerque to see the balloons take off. And, of course, the winds are too high so the mass ascension doesn't take place. Instead, we return to Santa Fe, purchase some groceries, a newspaper and make a late breakfast. But, it is nice not to have to hike today.

The Santa Fe New Mexican newspaper has an article about our arrival yesterday. You can read it at:

<http://www.santafenewmexican.com/Local%20News/Trek-through-history>

A strong cold front is passing through Utah and it's drawing a strong south wind through our area. In fact, the extra moisture combined with these winds develops some strong afternoon thunderstorms. One in particular heads our direction across the valley and we hustle to get things put away. No sooner do we get inside than the rain hits for a few seconds only to change into a hailstorm that lasts a couple minutes.

Henry Bigler of the original Battalion wrote: *"Late in the afternoon of the 9th [October 1846] we arrived in Santa Fe, in the midst of a storm of rain and hail..."*

It was too good an opportunity to pass up – to get pelted by a hail storm like they did in Santa Fe, so I run from the building out to get the camera and a solid pelting I did take. Pea sized hail was sheeting down in a 30 mph wind. Falling from high in the sky, the hail was supercooled way below 32 degrees. As I ran back to the building, a bunch of hail slid off the roof and went right down the neck of my shirt. Woo-hoo!

The Santa Fe LDS stake is hosting us for dinner and an evening program. Descendants are particularly invited to attend and about fifteen show with others to total about sixty persons. Not a bad turnout for a blustery autumn evening. Today has been declared "Mormon Battalion Trek Day" by the Mayor and

we are presented with an official recognition document to that affect. Larry Ogan and the Activities Committee have worked hard to develop this evening's program and it is delightful for us to be here.

Inez Ross is one of my inspirations for the Trek. Inez and some of her friends hiked the entire Santa Fe Trail a few years ago. They are all grandmother aged – we're talking retired ladies here folks. It took them eight years to accomplish their goal since they hiked mostly on weekends and made about ten miles per day – but they hiked the entire SFT from West to East. They are famous in modern SFT lore.

When I read the story of these ladies, I thought, "Well, if they can do it, I can do it" and that became one of the reasons I thought I could hike the Battalion Trail and try to learn something new about the original group. Inez is so sweet.

We are privileged this evening to have Inez in attendance and she graciously presents a first-person account of Marian Russell who traveled the Santa Fe Trail as a youth back in the 1850's. Inez has the story down pat and is theatrical in her movements and expressions. She keeps the audience captivated – transported to another time and place, delighted by the humor even among dangers and privations. I want to grow up to be like Inez someday.

Peter Guilbert shares the Battalion story by relating the story of his ancestor, Moses Wade and his son, Edward. Next, I tell a little about the Trek and why we're hiking the Trail. Mostly, I challenge the folks to keep this part of LDS history alive in their area – to "lift where they stand" – and use the Battalion as one mean to share their faith with their community and to share their talents in helping local groups with common interests.

We have all the descendants gather for a photo op, answer a bunch of questions, share insights and are blessed to have folks share their family history with us. It has been a fun evening. It seemed a very low key evening - no major stress for us; just be there and participate without having to get crazy in preparations. Speaking for myself, I was very glad we had a low energy day.

Finally, we get our showers, spend a little family time and make ready for bed. We opt to sleep indoors since the ground is pretty wet from the storm. Wimps, I know, but we'll be rested for tomorrow. Heck, Inez and her friends ALWAYS slept in motels.

[Sunday, Oct 12, – Santa Fe, NM](#)

After a wonderful night's sleep, we attend church here at the Santa Fe LDS Ward. Our visiting family members, Pat, Gayle and DaNece have left for home. It's a lovely day and we're going to upload the old blog entries we've been accumulating whilst out of range, send some family e-mails and generally have a very slow day. I actually had to go find a wireless internet connection so I could upload these stored up entries. Our broadband unit (VERIZION) is not very reliable - even when in a large city like Santa Fe.

Tomorrow will be busy with repairs, purchases and preparations for leaving. So please don't expect a large entry tomorrow - if any.

For Peter and Mark, we've decided to have a slide show of our collected photos after dinner.

So, with your forbearance, we'll end with a short entry today, wish all our friends well and catch you up as we proceed down the Rio Grande as we begin the second half of the Trek.

We appreciate all the support, prayers and suggestions.

[Monday, Oct 13 – Santa Fe, NM](#)

“Nothing of importance happened today.”

Today was a layover day for us. We had much work to do on the trailers and towing vehicles but not all of it got done. Tires are still causing some frustration, but we will get them straightened out - I hope. Denny did the wash, got some shopping accomplished and we're in fairly good shape to start Part II of the Trek.

Jerry's moved back in and rarin' to go do some driving for us. Good man and we're happy to have Denny's dad back with us.

[Tuesday, Oct 14 – Cerillos, NM](#)

Ay! Caramba! Somehow, the irony of having our very first day of DRENCHING rain while hiking occur at Santa Fe seems too ironic to be true, but true it is. I just don't associate this section of New Mexico with hard rain.

Mark Cummins, Peter Guilbert & I set off from the Palace of the Governors located on the Plaza at 8 AM. Before we'd gone a mile, the gentle mist turned into an all-out downpour that continued until about 1 PM. As this was a strong cold front, the temperatures dropped to the mid-50's and a slight breeze from the north pushed the chill factor down into the uncomfortable range for me.

To avoid a nasty day getting us sick, Denny managed to locate a couple rainslickers for the guys and I used my oilcloth for my raincoat. Still, I got wet enough that my fingers were ice cold, my feet were numb to the ankles and even my thighs started numbing. Marginal day for hiking.

We follow Agua Fria Road southwest out of Santa Fe. Near downtown, the old adobe houses have windows that go almost to ground level. The houses are right next to the road with only a foot or two of sidewalk between the outside wall and the traffic. The old road winds along the ridgeline that's about a quarter-mile south of the Santa Fe River. After a mile or so, the houses become more modern in their design although adobe/southwest exteriors must be mandated.

Agua Fria means “Cold Water” and today, it applies to the rain and not the stream. We pass San Isidro, one of the old churches from 1835 and off to our left a hundred yards or so, we can see traces of el Camino Real de Tierra Adentro in some of the original land lots that are preserved without buildings. This “Royal Road” of the Interior Lands dates back to 1598 when it's completion linked Taos New Mexico to Mexico City over 1,500 miles away. It was 250 years old when the Battalion passed by. What history must have been made along its route.

“Following the Royal Road; A Guide to the Historic Camino Real de Tierra Adentro” by Hal Jackson is a newly published road guide. Lavish with maps, photos and lots of historic tid-bits, Dr. Jackson managed to get this published just in time for the Trek to benefit from his years of work on this trail. I heartily recommend it for those who live in New Mexico and for those who want to follow sections that pertain to the Battalion. True, there are not many miles that the Battalion followed, but the Camino’s history lays the foundation for what the Battalion experienced on their march. The book is well worth the price for helping understand the Rio Grande Valley.

We pass Rancho de Los Golondrinas where we were on October 4-5 for their Harvest Festival. We pop in to see Mike King, present him with a Battalion poster and again express our appreciation for all the Rancho and its staff have contributed to our event. They were wonderful to us and we have a standing invitation to visit and participate anytime in the future.

From Dr. Jackson’s research, it seems more likely that the Battalion passed by Golondrinas on their way to La Cinega rather than following the route of modern road NM 14 to Cerrillos as proposed in a prior Battalion trail study. While there was a primitive trail leading south from La Cinega, there was a better one leading southwest out of La Cinega, “the last water on the road to the [Rio Grande] river” as Col Cooke described their route. Our experience today supports this new interpretation.

The final miles of our hike today curve around up and down to La Cinega which means “swamp” or “drowned land” as in a marsh or lake. Sure enough, there are a few small lakes and marshes here.

Late in the day, the sun comes out and we start drying out. I’m just glad we don’t have to stay in these same wet clothes overnight or sleep covered by a wet blanket on the wet ground. My hands regain feeling and we have a good cup of hot chocolate to warm our innards.

[Wednesday, Oct 15 – Pueblo San Felipe, NM](#)

Today started brilliant blue sky, bright sun and crisp air. Peter, Mark and I begin hiking at the intersection of I-25 and State 587 – aka “Entrada la Cienega.” We cross over the interstate to the south side, turn the corner and lo and behold! Ruts. Real El Camino Real ruts. It’s Mark’s first time seeing confirmed ruts and he gets pretty excited. Peter and I smile because we’re happy to see him so excited. Truth be known, I still get goose bumps finding ruts and standing in them.

After a photo shoot session with all our cameras, we continue hiking the frontage road for a couple miles, all the while glancing back to our left to see if we can keep finding sections of the Camino. Off and on, we convince ourselves we see ruts off in the fields, crossing at a stream with cottonwoods and along the side of the hills.

After about four miles, we’re faced with a ... well ... challenge. You see, New Mexico is investing in a high speed rail system expansion from Albuquerque to Santa Fe. The Rail-Runner track is almost done – and it parallels a goodly section of our “new” Battalion route as studied by Hal Jackson. This late variant of El Camino Real drops off a 600 foot high mesa into the Gallisteo River basin. It’s a better wagon road than the older and more established mule route and Dr Jackson thinks this is the route Col Cooke likely took.

We casually (well, as casually as one can wearing 1840's clothing) walk through the construction zone and down along the side of the tracks. Kids, don't try this. We figure if we can get three miles or so in, we will be past the construction and won't be bothered.

For the first mile or so, we do OK, but finally a supervisor type drives up in his truck and asks what we're doing. We explain our research to him, then he explains to us that it's an "active track" and dangerous. Not that we've seen anything on the tracks – certainly not a train – and after all, there weren't any "Do Not Enter" signs – so how were we to know? Acting dumb (ignorant) has served me well my whole life. It comes easy.

We promise to get off the property ASAP – but mention that hiking back is just about as far as hiking forward to where we want to go, so the supervisor encourages us to hurry up and get gone. Off we go and smile all the way down to the Gallisteo – checking out the ruts all along the way. Beautiful. Our luck holds. And, no prison time - yet.

We reach the limits of the Santo Domingo pueblo lands and in this case, discretion is the better part of valor, so we bundle into Jerry's vehicle and drive an "end run" around the off-limit area over to the Mormon Battalion monument just off I-25 at exit 257.

We're met there by Holly Young, a local photographer, writer and Battalion descendant. She'd arranged to meet us for a photo shoot. Turns out she's appointed herself as the monument's guardian angel. Seems there'd been a ton of trash, broken beer bottles, soiled diapers, etc., etc., etc., not to mention overgrown noxious weeds and other undesirable eyesores. Holly has taken it upon herself to maintain the monument property, place some trash barrels and promote the site when she can. Three hearty "huzzah's" for Holly, folks!

Come to think of it, last summer as I made my "drive through" survey of the route, I noted that quite a few of our Battalion historic site markers are in pretty bad shape. One city in particular had a nice marker but it was completely overgrown with weeds. That doesn't seem to square with "honorable remembrance" does it?

Isn't there any Scout Troop that will take on maintaining a marker in their area as a perpetual responsibility? Can each Stake maintain the markers within their boundary? Shame on us if we can't do this simple thing. What hope is there for a National Historic Trail designation if we can't maintain what we've done so far? Can we do better?

We transfer our vehicles to the San Felipe RV park where we plan to spend a couple nights. A nice dinner and off to bed we go.

[Thursday, Oct 16 – Bernalillo, NM](#)

This is pronounced, Burn-a-LEE-YO. It only takes about a hundred times for me to finally get it right.

Mark, Peter and I get an early morning start to cross the San Felipe tribal lands. First, we stop in at the Tribal Government center to see if there are any issues we should be aware of prior to hiking through.

The staff was most pleasant and carried our request to the Governor and tribal leaders. After a short time, Governor Tenorio and Vice Governor Chavez met with us. We explained our purpose in wanting to retrace the trail and that their tribe had been gracious to the 1846 group whom we were representing.

The tribal crest is inlaid into the Administration Building's entrance. Represented there are corn, pumpkins, melons, gourds and other items the tribe traded to the Battalion 162 years ago – and the tribal traditions are still strong.

They are seeking to preserve their old language and customs – things that are important not to lose. After all, we are reenactors and recognize the loss of many things from just five generations ago. Imagine a culture thousands of years old based upon oral traditions to share its history. Such things are easily lost. Remember what Nephi said about the importance of the brass plates in preserving his language and traditions?

Governor Tenorio explained our responsibilities to their people while on tribal lands: We are asked to not photograph or sketch the tribal lands in order to preserve their religious importance to their people. Trespassing into areas outside our planned route along the highway is not permitted. Of course, we agree to these conditions and express our appreciation for their hospitality.

The route down along the Rio Grande valley must have been a welcome change for the Battalion who had not been near a strong water source since they'd left the Missouri River nearly three months earlier. True, there had been streams but not any real river of importance except the Kaw (Kansas). Today's river bottoms are covered with cottonwood and other trees. The area in 1846 was almost barren, the trees having been cut over the decades for fuel, building and ceremonial uses.

In particular, off to our right, closer to the river, there is a large field of grass – about ten acres – with a scattering of large cottonwoods that are starting to show their yellows in the early fall. It's a very pretty sight, but one that will have to stay with Peter, Mark and I as a memory since we couldn't photograph it to share with you, dear reader.

Down the river bottoms we hike as the Camino Real winds between bluffs and flood plain. The tall, black capped basalt volcanic mesas to the west across the river tell of eruptions and faulting that formed the valley. The sky is deep blue today and it's pleasantly warm. We pass a friendly farmer in his field who waves and we wonder as we wave back if the corn being harvested is a community garden or his own.

At the end of our day's hike, we return to the camper and begin preparing to travel south. This evening, we will move to the Kirkpatrick's outside of Albuquerque. This will be our "home base" for a few days while we're in the metro area.

And we get a most pleasant surprise. As I'm dumping contents of the Jed Clampett Memorial Port-a-Potty, I hear Denny giving a squeal of pure delight. Sticking my head out from behind the little green house, it seems that my sister-in-law Lisa, my daughter Catherine and grandson Trent have arrived unannounced for a visit. Sneaky family. Sorry, gotta go.

[Friday, Oct 17 – Rancho de Albuquerque, NM](#)

Ach! My ingrown toenail is better but still in trouble, so I've made an appointment for Monday to get it amputated. OK – not really amputated. Just get the toenail cut out so I can finish the hike to California.

Since Mark, Peter and Denny are willing to hike trail today and let me rest my foot, I take the opportunity to work on our BLM permit for Arizona. There's a specific area we need a special permit in order to use a motorized vehicle and since it's a "first come, first serve" permit process and there are only ten permits issued annually, I have to hurry to get the application in today.

So, I have nothing of importance to report for this day as pertaining to the Trek.

Daughter Catherine and GSon Trent and sister-in-law Lisa are visiting and it's wonderful to have them here. Trent is a hoot. At 23 months old, he's a chatter-box that hardly ever quits telling you about things. Trucks in particular. He likes the "big yellow truck" we have. Family. Gotta love them.

[Saturday, Oct 18 – Albuquerque, NM](#)

Blaine Bachman and Ron Kirkpatrick are the local folks who have done lots of leg work to pull together a couple of events here in Albuquerque.

This morning, Blaine has organized a "day hike." About sixty Scouts, Cubs, young women and old men join us to hike into the Old Town Plaza. Ron has arranged our afternoon events. Read on.

Jerry and Ron "enlist" the "recruits" having each of them sign a volunteer form. They are "inspected" to determine they are of sound mind, not drunken with alcohol and medically capable of performing their duties as soldiers.

Mark and Peter act as quartermasters, distributing packs, belts, muskets and canteens to the youth. Then, using the 1846 "Articles of War for the Armies of the United States", I have the youth raise their right hand and "swear" them into the service using the same language to swear in the 1846 group and commit them to protect the United States against all enemies, to obey the orders of the President and of their officers.

We start hiking along the riverfront trail to Old Town Albuquerque. It's not exactly the same route the Battalion likely used, but for most of the hike we're within a mile of the old route to the Plaza. The group is carrying ten muskets. Our period packs are heavy and soon are less of a novelty than an annoyance, bringing to mind Col Allen's comments about the men not wanting their guns for very long.

Along our pathway on 23 October 1846, Lt Col Cooke had to resort to dispersing his Battalion's companies for their night camps. There wasn't enough forage in a confined area for his animals, so they were "encamped on the road, extending half a mile along strips of grass."

I've mentioned that Mark Cummins is a fast hiker – well in excess of four miles per hour. It appears Ron Kirkpatrick is another speed demon. He flits back and forth from the front to the back of the group, checking on people, places and things. We needed this man months ago when we were doing our planning and looking for an organizer to help us.

When we arrive at the Plaza, a wedding is underway – 30 minutes later than they were supposed to be, so we quietly (as quietly as possible with jangling canteens, muskets, etc.) move to the far side of the plaza and take a seat on the grass. The wedding planner looked pretty flustered as a military parade threatens to rain on her wedding, but we try hard to not disturb the happy event.

Always looking for a way to take the edge off a rough spot, I put the kids up to a cheer for the bride and groom using the old “Huzzah” cheer instead of “Hurrah” as we do today. Hey, it’s old style reenactor stuff.

So, as the happy couple descends from the gazebo where they took their vows, the Battalion group sends up, “Three cheers for the Bride and Groom.” “Huzzah! Huzzah! Huzzah!” (Note: One must also wave ones hat in the air as they give this cheer.)

It rather takes everyone in the plaza by surprise but after the initial shock, even the bride and groom smile and are pretty pleased with the unexpected embellishment to their wedding. And it didn’t cost anything to boot. Probably the only freebie of the day.

The city staff folks quickly rearrange the sound equipment and we take the stage down near the cannons. After asking the spectators to join us in a pledge to the flag, we explain our hike, the local involvement on our hike today and the importance of the original Battalion’s journey through Albuquerque.

At the southeast corner of the plaza stands a building in which the nephew of Governor Manuel Armijo had a store. Susan Magoffin comments on the store as do Battalion journalists Keysor and Pettigrew.

As we start to disperse from the Plaza, our family members also must take their leave. Now I can empathize better with original Battalion members who had to see “the girl I left behind.” At 3 PM, we’re scheduled for a presentation at the Museum of Albuquerque. We’re in the small theater and about 15 people show. Since it’s a beautiful early fall Saturday afternoon, one can understand there not being a door busting crowd for a couple lectures about an obscure military outfit from 150 plus years ago.

Ron Kirkpatrick gives a good rundown about the Battalion in the Rio Grande valley area. He concentrates on journal entries by the men and weaves a good talk out of the descriptions left to us. My presentation is very informal since most of the people had ancestors in the Battalion and the story is fairly well known. I concentrate on the lessons learned and give a general overview of the route, the Trek and my involvement with Scouting. A few questions afterward and it’s close to closing time , so we beat a hasty retreat as another wedding get started. My, but Albuquerque downtown seems to be “the place” for weddings.

Dinner and bedtime about 11 PM.

[Sunday, Oct 19 – Albuquerque, NM](#)

We attended Ron & Susan's LDS ward. We're too tired to do much else. In fact, we're so tired we even make our church meetings into a day of rest. Not that the lessons are boring - we're just bushed after these special events. Somehow they really seem to take it out of us.

[Monday, Oct 20 – Pueblo Isleta, NM](#)

While Denny and Ron Kirkpatrick are out hiking the Battalion trail, my route leads me to a podiatrist in Albuquerque. My ingrown toenail finally has to come out. The details will not be given to you but suffice it to say my left great toe is somewhat sore.

I continue my online research and planning whilst others get to enjoy the fall day. Perhaps I can convince Denny to give some details of their hiking. Otherwise, nothing of importance happened on this day, dear reader.

[Tuesday, Oct 21 – Belen, NM](#)

Day two of my confinement. Nothing to report.

[Wednesday, Oct 22 – Bosque, NM](#)

Day three of my confinement.

Correction to Monday's stopping location. It was pueblo Isleta, not Belen as previously reported. Today's stopping location is pronounced "Boss-key" meaning a wooded place or grove. Thus, Bosque del Apache is the grove of trees inhabited by members of the Apache tribe of Indians.

Nothing else to report, other than I'm starting to feel mighty ornery.

[Thursday, Oct 23 – La Joya, NM](#)

Day four of my confinement but I get to hike some today. Not far – just a couple miles, but it proves the toes will get by just fine. It looks like tomorrow I'll give it a go and try hiking with Ron. Toe feels much, much better.

Ron and I drive around to inspect the sand hills we propose to hike tomorrow. We are trying to make sense of the journal entries with what the men say in their journals. This area is part of a National Wildlife Refuge, so if you're in the area, check with the officials to know what's permitted and what isn't.

Today is Denny's birthday and she turns ... well, she's still younger than I.

[Friday, Oct 24 – Polverde, NM](#)

Yippee! I get to go hiking again. Today Ron and I hoped to puzzle out the Battalion's route over some sand hills north of Polverda.

This is the place Col Cooke described as being where, *“a sand hill reaching the river bank was encountered; two hours, with teams doubled, and twenty men to a wagon, were required to reach its top,—only three or four hundred paces.”* That means eight mules and twenty men per wagon, which still takes about two hours to advance about four-tenths of a mile – or about an hour to go a quarter-mile.

After hiking up and down the hills, we’re no more confident about their route than when we started. There are some “obvious” routes they “could” have taken, but nothing to tell us which one or even if our suppositions are correct. Perhaps we will locate additional information in the future, but for now, their route remains lost in the obscurity of shifting sands. Even to locals are not sure where the oldest roads went. Maybe we will check with the County Recorder.

In the evening I repair some electrical wiring in the trailer (so I can blog more easily at night) and we get a late dinner, then off to bed.

[Saturday, Oct 25 – Socorro, NM](#)

We think we’ve finally figured out how to improve our “real time” tracking so it’s more consistently updating. You can see our GPS route updates about every ten minutes by going to this URL:

<http://share.findmespot.com/shared/faces/viewspots.jsp?glld=0xCzFkFsr4NDE2lxYk2y5qghNC7jJba4>

Today is Ron Kirkpatrick’s last day hiking this week. He’s been a great assistance to the Trek and has earned our heartfelt appreciation for all his work, encouragement, upbeat outlook and uncomplaining patience. We also appreciate Susan, his wife, for letting Ron come play with us all week. Susan is a trooper. May be Ron can join us again sometime in the future.

Nothing in particular about our route today - fifteen miles total. We pass south of Lamitas (aka, Limitar) where the valley narrows to just two thirds of a mile wide. Perhaps this is the location where Azariah Smith and others in the advance group had to get into the water and repair the road for the wagons. Pueblito Point is a highly likely candidate for this event.

We complete our hiking just after noon. Ron’s daughter, Jana joins us to hike along our last mile of el Camino Real into the Socorro plaza. Interestingly, the LDS church building is on the Camino so the Battalion marched past the future building site some 162 years ago. Next we passed the “new” Catholic chapel. This building was built after the Battalion’s time, but in the same location as the old building. A short stroll brings us to the plaza – the smallest one we’ve seen. Makes one wonder if this was the original plaza for Socorro. Have to look into that sometime.

We celebrate by driving down to the Owl Café at San Antonio, south of Socorro. The Owl is a local hang out known for catering to atomic scientists, Army workers and others involved with nuclear testing. The grill has quite a few commendations and project posters hanging from the walls. The place is known for its green chili cheese burgers and has become somewhat of a regional legend.

We high-tail it back to Socorro to get jobs done. This will be one of the few “large” towns we will have until we reach Tucson in mid-December. While Denny works in the trailer, I go to work on the outside

fixes, get the 'burban washed, put things away in the Henski Truck and work on catching up the blog. As I write this, it's slightly after midnight but it's been a great day and a great week for us Trekkers.

[Sunday, Oct 26 – Socorro, NM](#)

It's been a very mellow day for us. Beautiful sunrise and we were treated to a quiche, hash brown, sausage, OJ and bacon breakfast by our hosts, Peter and Jana Valdez. As Bob Tingey would say, "*Where's the suffering?*" The RV is parked beside the Valdez's apartment and we are pulling power to run our necessary equipment that lets us keep everyone in touch.

After breakfast we attend services and speak with quite a few folks. Then, an afternoon of letters, planning and a rousing evening of dominos with Jana. Again, I get to work on past-due blogs then off to bed after midnight.

[Monday, Oct 27 – Socorro, NM](#)

After leaving Albuquerque, the Battalion had difficulty with the deep sands which slowed down their progress considerably. We're taking advantage of our faster hiking pace and trading being "ahead of schedule" for conducting some research in Socorro and the area.

Mike Bilbo is the BLM Recreation Planner at Socorro Field Office. Mike was one of the reenactors at Golondrinas a few weeks ago (on his own time). He also is quite excited about our re hike and has been of immense help in determining whether our proposed hike route will be on public lands. Today I spent most of the day in consultation with BLM staff, volunteers and checking maps. They also have a marvelous aerial photographic collection.

We get to show off our Battalion route software and history project to a few of the staff. The GIS specialist gave it a hearty "Way cool!" vote of approval. Such expressions of admiration are highly appreciated coming from those who do GIS for a living. Being a 'newbie' to the geographic information systems world is daunting. I wasn't raised on computer programming and have had to learn it on the fly while holding down jobs, being a parent, having church callings and doing volunteer work. So, to be told that I'm breaking "new ground" (which I'm NOT) is flattering even if it's not entirely correct. There are lots of others doing similar things. I'm just putting a history spin on the content. Others will get around to it soon enough.

But, I'm finalizing a proposal to present at a BYU conference next summer. The application has to be in by Thursday, so it will be another late night so we can mail tomorrow. We will let you know how it goes. If we're accepted, it will be a three or four day series of "show and tell" about the Battalion route, the things we're learning during the Trek and areas for future study.

[Tuesday, Oct. 28 – San Antonio, NM](#)

Hiking early today, I'm joined by Mike Bilbo, a local reenactor and an employee of the wonderful Socorro BLM District Field Office. Mike, in both his official and unofficial capacities has been very helpful and encouraging. He's also someone who cares about the history all around him.

We tool out of the Socorro Plaza just after 8 AM and Mike regales me with all the local information. When we were at Rancho de las Golondrinas early this month, Mike and I didn't get to spend much time together. We were both pretty busy with our respective reenacting responsibilities, so I didn't have a good opportunity to get to know him. It was delightful to find that Mike is a renaissance man – well versed and knowledgeable regarding many things.

Socorro is old – very old. The original pueblo predates the arrival of Juan Onate in 1598. That was just 400 years ago, so yes, Socorro is old. At the same time, they've got a lot going for them now. The Battalion men and Lt. Emory note the mineral deposits. The New Mexico college of mining was established here in the late 1800's. Lots of students still. Juan Onate named it Socorro, meaning "succor" or "aid" as here his group were hosted well by the native tribe. We've been treated well also.

Our route south out of town led past the old Dragoon (cavalry) camp, then along the base of the bluffs and beside the acequia (prn: Ah-SECK-e-ah) or canal. Through this whole stretch, the canal stayed beside the bluffs and away from the river, just where you'd also expect the road to be. The new canals are much larger and longer than the old ones, but the principles still apply on where things should be located. There's a good logic to it.

As we pass a canal work site, Mike casually mentions how cloudbursts will create flash floods that bring down lots of rocks, gravel and sand from the mountains. If the storm is severe, the debris may cross over the canal and block it, requiring a thorough cleaning; shoveling it out so water can flow again. I note that just downstream of the partially blocked canal, there's a section of water moving faster – like a mini-rapid.

That triggers my mind on a Battalion member (was it Hancock?) [krh – it was Col Cooke] mentioning there being rapids in the Rio Grande. The comment seemed out of place when I read it since the Rio Grande isn't the kind of river to have rapids, but the comment stuck in my mind. When Mike tells about having to clean out the acequia's, the rapids comment finally makes sense.

REALLY severe floods or repeated floods from the same canyon would carry debris out past the canal all the way to the river, creating either a constriction or a complete damming of the river. This would create a rapid at the blockage...AND...the blocking material would form a large alluvial fan and "push" the river to the opposite side of the valley. HA! The journalist comment finally makes sense and the casual comment may make it possible to pin down another location along the Rio Grande. Gotta find the comment and check the maps to find a BIG alluvial fan for the day they recorded the rapids.

The communities were getting very few and far between in 1846. In fact, as we pass through this area, it represents the last set of communities until the Battalion reached Tucson in mid-December.

San Antonio is small and I refuse to give any more free publicity to a restaurant that serves below average hamburgers that are overpriced – even if they have fancy-schmancy chili pepper sauce.

In the evening, Mike and his wife Barbara treated us to dinner at a local restaurant. After eating, we just sat and chatted for over an hour about all kinds of things – a continuation of our earlier wide ranging

discussions. We enjoyed the time away from camp and the opportunity to converse with someone other than ourselves.

[Wednesday, October 29 – Bosque del Apache NWR](#)

A late start due to another flat tire on the trailer. Grrrrr!

But finally, we start hiking out of San Antonio where we stopped yesterday. It's a small village – probably the last one the Battalion passed on their way south. Still not much here. There's a nice 200 acre parcel for sale if anyone's interested. Water rights go with it.

Today's highlight is our entrance into the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Bosque (prn: BOSS-kay or key – both seem to be OK) means "Wood" and the rest is probably self explanatory. The Apache Woods or Woods of the Apaches was an old time gathering place for the traders. Cottonwoods and willows constituted the woods providing a campsite with shade – a rare luxury in this area.

The staff reminds us that hiking off approved trails is not allowed. After all, the concept of a wildlife refuge is that the animals come first; recreation and people second. They also warn me I cannot carry my musket on the NWR. No problem.

There are thousands of snow geese – blazing white in the bright fall sunlight while they float on the deep blue water reflecting the skies color. Behind them are red and chocolate brown mountains with creamy tan layers of limestone.

In a few weeks this place will be swarming with birds. The Sand Hill cranes will be here in force – some have already arrived. Hundreds of bird species migrate through this location. It really is quite spectacular. So spectacular that the place will also be swarming with thousands of birders. Sorry we won't be here to see it and participate. Put it on our list of things to do/see when Trek is done.

In 1846 one of the Battalion guys shot a pelican here and taking the throat pouch, made himself a hat to protect himself from the sun. Couldn't do that today. You'd land in jail. Do Not Pass Go. Do Not Collect \$200. Go to jail. Go directly to jail.

[Thursday, October 30 – Tiffany Canyon, NM](#)

Note: If you're tracking us with a map, don't look for Tiffany Canyon as a town. It's a large arroyo that empties into the west side of the Rio Grande. It's about 8 miles north of Fort Craig historic site. Check the website for our tracking updates. To see our progress, go to:

<http://share.findmespot.com/shared/faces/viewspots.jsp?glId=0xCzFkSrt4NDE2lxYk2y5qghNC7jJba4>

At Socorro, we say goodbye to Jana and Peter who have hosted us for nearly a week. Thanks guys. Good luck on grad school.

But, wait... not so fast. We can't leave YET!

I have to put the final polish on the BYU Ed Week proposal then print it. Denny runs it down to the overnight freight expediter office for next day delivery. Jerry works on getting the trailer ready to move. I get a phone call for a newspaper interview that takes an hour and then have to send more forms via e-mail that THAT takes another hour to complete.

We have to get fueled up, purchase a few odds-n-ends before we leave civilization, make camping reservations, check our maps against our plans, find the radios, eat some lunch, then we finally move the vehicles down to Fort Craig. We set the new camp, greet the BLM camp host couple, Diane and Arthur who we'll spend some time with later.

About 4 PM, I finally climb in the car and Denny ferries me to the south end of the Bosque del Apache NWR (see yesterday). The Snow Geese are still around so Denny gets to check them out and then see the cranes. Did you know the Crane family of bird species is over 50 million years old? I didn't, but it sure explains why they look so... dinosaur-ish – don't you think?

Didn't expect it today, but I think I found some wagon swales as I hiked. After a few miles I get to Tiffany Canyon – a very large arroyo canyon that drains I don't know how many square miles – but it's big. Denny and I meet up at the end of a road just as the sun sets and it starts to get dark.

We take some photos of the very thin waxing crescent moon, Venus and Jupiter. Arriving back at the trailer about 8 PM I notice that it's the first time we've had dark skies for weeks – since about Springer at the last new moon. I pull out the maps and work on our route for the next few days while Denny cooks. We have just enough energy to eat, clean up and head to bed after another long day.

On the other hand, we're excited because we're about to enter the area where Cooke's Wagon Road was cut by the Battalion.

[Friday, Oct. 31 – Fort Craig, NM](#)

Awake about 4:30 AM but lie still while Denny sleeps on. Orion and the Dogs are up high in the southern sky. Eventually there's a slow graying to the east and Fra Cristobal Mountain catches the ruby red sunrise while the entire valley is still in shadow.

After morning ablutions, I'm sitting at the table as the sun clears the horizon behind Black Mesa. Light is coming in over my left shoulder and the entire valley is golden hued. Outside, a cottontail wanders through the side yard hopping a few feet, nibbling, then moving on for other food. It's the kind of morning that makes your heart sing and grateful to be alive to see such a day begin.

Denny and I prepare to ride our "mule" today. The trail in this area is so poorly known and access is so uncertain that we decide to resort to using the off road vehicle (ORV) to help us cover far more ground than we could just by hiking alone. We return to Tiffany Canyon where we stopped yesterday and while Denny starts hiking the canal road, I drive to the base of the bluffs looking for evidence of original trail.

The Rio Grande valley in this area experienced some horrendous floods back in the 1860's and in 1929. An area we passed this morning was reportedly covered by as much as 18 feet of silt, so I don't expect much. With erosion from river course changes and deposition by floods – what are the chances?

Still, I drive over to the bluffs. Within a quarter-mile, I believe I can see faint swales to the east of the two-track road I'm following. Proceeding further south, there appear unmistakable traces of wagon road and old habitations. The foundation ruins are younger than the Battalion period, but back then, one didn't build new roads just for fun, so major sections of this road were followed by the Battalion then used as the area developed with more settlers.

Once we find the road, we shift to it and hike the bluffs. As the journalists wrote, there's lots of sand and hills to climb up and down. Not large hills, to be sure, but hills and sand don't mix well. Their journey is more amazing to me every day.

There's even a major cemetery with hundreds of graves. Most interesting to me is that so many graves lack headstones, covered instead by cobblestones – much like the descriptions of Battalion members who died and were buried along the way. Of those with headstones, many lack any inscription. A few have a just a cross to proclaim their faith, but whose names are known only unto God. It was tough out here for a long time.

We are guests on the Armandaris Land Grant Ranch that dates back to Spanish Colonial times. It's currently owned by Ted Turner, a staunch preservationist, environmentalist and who wants to see this land returned to a more natural status. Large sections of the area are being worked to remove salt cedar and other invasive trees. Cottonwoods are being replanted to bring the area back to what it was like when the Chihuahua Trail was active – more like what the Battalion experienced.

Our campsite for the night – and the end of today's hike is Fort Craig, an Army post from the Civil War period. In fact, a major CW battle – the Battle of Valverde, was fought right here. The Fort is in ruins but is very similar to Fort Union which we visited early this month back near Watrous. This site had over 20,000 visitors last year – amazing but true. We're nearly ten miles by road to I-25 and five of that is via dirt road. You have to love Civil War history to come here but people do because it's important to remember.

Tomorrow we have another eight miles to do, a mesa to hike and the el Camino Real International Heritage Center to visit. Until tomorrow evening, I remain YHS –

Ebenezer Brown, 2nd Sgt, Co A

PS – Riding the ORV today, I learned that my beard has become aerodynamic. Apparently it has a significant drag coefficient when I'm at speed. If I turn slightly sideways, it wants to snap my head around when it catches the wind. Weird. This effect isn't noticeable at 3 mph or even 4 when I'm in a rush. – krh

PPS – Oh! And I found another live rattlesnake today – my second of the Trek. Was stooping to examine a mineral encrustation on a boulder when I noticed it moving a couple feet off to my right. Only 18

inches or so with just 2 or 3 buttons. He was buzzing those tiny little buttons for all he was worth as he worked his way backwards under some other boulders. Cute little guy. Didn't have the camera though. Dang! - krh

November 2008

Saturday, November 1 – Ft. Craig, NM

Well, of my three goals for today (ambitious, aren't I?), we managed to only tour the ruins of Fort Craig. The other two goals were suborned by lassitude which set in today.

Denny and I were off just after sunrise. We motored back down to the Rio Grande on the ORV seeking a passable trail route leading to el Camino Real International Heritage Center, which, by my figuring is less than eight miles away. Starting where we left off yesterday's very clear and hike-able trail leading into the Fort Craig area, I'd hoped it would continue down river but the maps and photos are very unclear and locals weren't very knowledgeable.

When we reached the purported trailhead, I hopped off and started bushwhacking. Unlike the trail just fifty yards to the north, this section immediately plunged me into impenetrable cottonwood/tamarisk thickets. It was slow going for about 300 yards and I realized this section wasn't enjoying the attention yesterday's trail had received. The trail IS here – at least for some distance – but you just can't follow it under these hiking conditions.

Calling for Denny to follow a clear-cut road that I hoped paralleled my direction, we were able to tag up and extract me from the nightmare of brambles, branches and blockage.

But! Not to admit defeat easily, we go east a quarter-mile and start hiking the canal frontage road. This is the "Low Flow" canal that feeds Rio Grande water into the Elephant Butte Lake. Our next four hiking days will be along the western side of the lake – so more about it next week.

After about two miles, the canal road on the west side peters out in a marsh. The silting of the reservoir has covered the road. We're stymied again and will have to try another routing.

Now, remember that HIKING is NOT the primary goal of the Trek. Obtaining a better understanding of the original route and the areas through which they traveled is our primary goal. Having said (well-written) that, we DO want to hike the trail – when we can find it.

Last night, just before dark, I drove down a powerline road to see if it might lead somewhere. It went in the general direction we needed to go, so it became our third probe for the trail today. Same result in that we are "marshed" and cannot continue along the line. We also sought where the trail may cross the powerline road but could not identify it.

A final probe was made by following the property fence line to the west but sadly, to no avail. We came up against an old oxbow lake which extended to the property line leaving us no recourse but to admit we couldn't continue southwest along the river/bluff front where the trail is probably located – even if it's not under silt.

By this time, we'd pretty much wasted the morning and with only three hiking miles completed that approximated the trail route, I was somewhat frustrated. Dang!

We headed back to camp and grabbed some lunch. Comfort food, that is.

In preparation for holding a memorial service, I recalculated (again) the probable area where original Battalion members James Hampton and John Green may be buried. I'm convinced they lie somewhere between twelve and fifteen miles south of the campsite at Black Mesa. We will hold that memorial service on Monday when we get to the area.

As we're sitting in the trailer conducting some business, a knock at the door brings Jill and Harold Rushton for a visit. Jill is a descendant of the Lugo family in California that sold property to Battalion members after their discharge. Harold's family goes back before Nauvoo, but he isn't sure about any Battalion connections. They were sightseeing here at Fort Craig and saw the "Henski" truck's "BATTALION TREK" signage, so they popped in for a chat. We really appreciate that kind of spontaneous contact. Jill had been at Bosque del Apache checking out the birds and painting some scenes. Jill presented one to Denny and it now hangs in the trailer. Denny, BTW, took a painting class with two LDS ward members back home a couple years ago. Maybe we can get her to tell the story sometime, eh?

The lassitude REALLY set in and I had to have a quick nap. The past few nights I'd been waking up at 4 AM and not getting to bed until after midnight, so I was prime for a short rest.

Finally, Diane and Art, hosts here at Ft. Craig stopped by to chat. Denny and Diane retire to their trailer and discuss the finer points of quilting/knitting while Art, Jerry and I take a tour around the fort grounds. Diane and Art are on a two-year assignment as caretakers/hosts for the fort. We're intrigued by the lifestyle they lead and they're quite interesting folks to boot.

It's the end of daylight savings time tonight, so don't forget to "fall back" and turn the clocks back one hour, otherwise you'll be at church early tomorrow morning. Socorro for church tomorrow again.

[Sunday, November 2 – Ft. Craig, NM](#)

After church in Socorro we had dinner with the fort hosts, Diane and Art. Diane's "Brazilian crochet" work truly is as beautiful as Denny had told us. Art was an aeronautical engineer until he retired. Now they protect the site from vandals, grave robbers, etc. Art has taken up carving wooden automobiles while Diane quilts and crochets.

We spent some time with the maps for the next two weeks. We have some folks joining us along the way, so we need to make sure we're ready in all respects for them.

Letters and phone calls to family members occupied the rest of our day and now it's time for bed. BTW – Denny had a great spiritual insight into yesterday's "frustrating day." I'll see if I can get her to post an entry about her thoughts. But, for now, it's time to head to bed.

[Monday, Nov 3 – Ft. Craig, NM](#)

You know that story about the twin brothers – one an incurable optimist, the other a pessimist? Their parents, worried the kids aren't in the real world, take them to a shrink who says to give the pessimist every toy imaginable but give the optimist a pile of horse poop. You know that story?

...as we hear Kevin say gleefully, "I'm **SURE** there's a trail in here somewhere. I just **KNOW** there is!"

Well, I've come to the conclusion that south of Ft. Craig, either the trail is hiding in plain sight or I'm blind – or, possibly it's eroded away.

Leaving Ft. Craig, I follow a trail across the flats. It passes southwest of Ft. Craig. This section is clearly visible on the overhead photos and while I hike, the trace of creosote bushes is easy to follow for a mile or so. Then, that trail drops off the table lands towards the Rio Grande – somewhere I can't go because the river has flooded the lowlands along the bluffs. In 2004, the water in the river and Elephant Butte Lake was so low, I could have walked in the river bed for miles.

Today however, I get to go "over hill and dale" as Lt. Emory described his experience. If you haven't read Lt. Emory's journal, you really ought to do so. It's online at:

<http://www.discoverseaz.com/History/EmoryReports.html>

Pay attention to Emory's entries for October 5 through 8 which approximates our progress from Socorro to Fra Cristobal Mountain.

For me, it's a downright warm day and thinking I'd be done in less than two hours, I only took a pint of water. Mistake. Nor did I take some "energy food." Mistake. Besides, I'm hiking alone overland and there's no access road in close proximity. Normally, I'm not this dumb folks – really. So far, I haven't ever killed or maimed anyone on any of my escapades nor have I ever seriously injured myself, so don't take my lapse of good judgment today as an indication that I'm really an idiot.

My problem is that I'm just **ABSOLUTELY, POSITIVELY SURE** there's a trail in here somewhere and that I can find it if I just wander around long enough, talk to enough people and consult enough maps.

Sadly, that may not always be the case and it's hard for me to "give up." To the tune of over four hours of hiking alone in the New Mexico desert without sufficient water. Dumb, dumb, dumb.

Rather than sticking to my game plan of hiking a direct course, I get intrigued by a possible hint of a subtle trail, and off I go on a tangent. Then, since I'm close, I decide to hike down to the bluffs by the river to see if I could possibly pick up some traces of the trail.

By the time I reach el Camino Real International Heritage Center some six miles later, I'm mildly dehydrated and starting to wear down. My wanderings have burned lots of extra energy going up and down hills. Mild headache. Cranky. Very tired. Classic symptoms of dehydration.

Denny is waiting for me with some food and lots of water. An electrolyte replacement fluid (brand names are usually omitted since their companies decided to not sponsor us) is most welcome. Good woman.

We hike the frontage road to make some miles for the day. Oh, and before we leave the Heritage Center, a visitor spots a rattlesnake coiled up near the entrance. This guy is unhappy and willing to let everyone know it. He's buzzing for all he's worth. Courtesy of the Heritage Center, we use a snake tool to remove the two and a half-footer and send him into an arroyo. That makes a total of three rattlers we've seen since starting. Lt. Emory says he saw only two rattlers between Las Vegas, NM and this area. Consequently, we can assume that the danger of rattlesnakes is generally overstated.

Late dinner - prepare for tomorrow and get some sleep.

[Tuesday, Nov 4 – South Monticello Campground](#)

We spent more than half the day moving the support vehicles to this new location, so hiking time was very limited today. We've been told that there isn't a road going south down the west side of the river. And, there are very few roads that penetrate all the way down to the river from NM Highway 1. Since we're not anxious to have a repeat of yesterday, we unload Jerry's ORV and start probing to see what sites we can get to.

A word about how we decide where to hike:

Carl Larson's "Annals of the Mormon Battalion" ([available through the Mormon Battalion Assn.'s website](#)) is our primary source for determining the 1846 progress and route. We also utilize other primary source documents; journals by other contemporary travelers, maps and sketches.

Reading the journals and making note of what they see, how far they said they marched and comparing that with known locations, one can start making sense of the varied claims of distances. For example – on any given day, one journalist will claim they hiked eighteen miles; another claims only twelve. Who is right? Or, are they both right? Or, are they both wrong? In some cases, the journalists are really penning life histories and are relying on their memory twenty, thirty or forty years later – or taking the word of someone else's journal or distance calculations.

While I haven't conducted a statistical analysis of the distance claims (something to do in the future), it is possible to say they typically overestimate their distances by 10% to 20%. Interestingly enough, it seems Levi Hancock is generally closer on his distance estimate than most of the others – with the possible exception of Col. Cooke.

Since their distance estimates have a built in error, we can sometimes correct for that when we don't have a town or landmark to compare against. For example; if we can "bookend" a section of the trail – say Agua Fria and Albuquerque and we know it took two days to get from one to the other, we can then use their distance estimates, see if it matches the actual distance and if not, apply any "correction" necessary to make things match up. If they estimate one day at 40% of the distance, we'd apply that 40% to the end of the first day.

Now in reality, Aqua Fria to Albuquerque isn't the best example to use, but that's how I work on determining their distances where there isn't a known landmark.

Once we think we know where we should hike, we have to consult modern day maps. Is there public access or is the land privately owned? Is there a public access roadway that parallels our desired route? Can we get permission to hike private land? Is there some local person who can help us get access? Are there permits required? Etc., etc., etc.

Why am I bothering to blog this and weary your eyes?

For the stretch from San Antonio (last town on their trail) down to Fosters' Hole watering tanks, there's MASSIVE CONFUSION. Every writer – both from 1846 and modern – has a different story to tell about campsites, where they were on any given day. It's a mess. That's one of the major reasons for rehiking the supposed trail – to try and make sense of WHAT THE BATTALION men say and what our modern interpretations indicate.

Yesterday afternoon late, we took the ATV and went probing. Didn't hike – we just rode to these locations that we cannot hike between. Nogal Canyon is gated just three miles from the river. Dang! I think that's where Hampton and Green are buried.

Today, we have to backtrack to some of these sites. Since it's late afternoon, we work back to get as much as we can before sundown. We start at Monticello Canyon. Levi Hancock, bless his heart, actually sketched their campsite along the Rio Grande. Somewhere very close to our camp is where they camped. He also notes that General Kearny left his wagons at this location.

We move upriver to the south end of "The Narrows" – a section they talk about, but apparently did not travel through. It's pretty dramatic scenery. Then we backtrack to NM 1, travel a couple miles more north, then eight back to the river. This is the upper end of The Narrows. Since this is as close as we'll get to Nogal Canyon, we hold the memorial service for Hampton and Green at sunset. It's a beautiful setting, deep in the canyon of the Rio Grande, close to where these two men were buried. It's a solemn thing for us, to remember them and consider what their lives "could" have been.

Today is also Election Day. There are other opportunities for things that "could" have been and hopefully things will work out for the best in the long run.

[Wednesday, Nov 5 – South Monticello Campground](#)

Since we can't find original trail in this area, Denny and I hike into Truth or Consequences along Lakeshore Road. It's about 18 miles, leaving us some time to make calls and arrangements for upcoming activities further along the trail.

In fact, we are informed today that our oldest son, Christopher and his family will be coming to spend the weekend with us. That encourages us to speed our pace so we can take a day off from hiking while they're here. They are bringing their "pioneer" clothes, but with the kids ranging in ages from 2 to 11, we can't do much hiking with them. It will be a fun weekend.

The Battalion continued down the Rio Grande valley and made note of some features – including Elephant Butte though they only see it from a distance. This is evidence they were not in the river

canyon, but somewhere slightly to the west as they moved down river. If possible, we'll consult with local historians to see if old maps are available, but time is short here.

[Thursday, Nov 6 – Caballo State Park, NM](#)

We started before daybreak to move south. Again, it takes lots of time to move and be prepared for moving away from "civilization." With family coming for the weekend, we also have to get other supplies than what we normally do; lots of paper plates, kid foods and lots of extra things we want to help make the experience special.

Denny and I headed out at 2:30 to get today's hiking in. We managed 15 miles and got from Williamsburg (west side of Truth or Consequences) to within sight of the Cabello Lake dam. Not bad for a short day.

The Cabillo mountain chain stretches about ten miles north to south and the river flows close to the base along a fault valley. There isn't much water flowing in the river as most of it has been drawn off for irrigation purposes. And the reservoir is pretty thin on water. The lower sections of the Cabellos are a pink granite rock, so as the sun sets they really get red and are quite dramatic. We're close enough to them that they retain their 3-D appearance. The stark shadows against the red, tan and dark gray rocks make for a great show this evening.

We arrive back at camp just at dark for a late meal. Do you notice a theme here with echoes of the original Battalion? Dinner was often late – frequently after dark? Or the mess wagons arrived very late so the men had nothing to eat? I hadn't thought too much about that, but the parallel is definitely there. We just aren't trying to match their experiences – especially with late dinners, but these things keep popping up in unexpected ways.

[Friday, Nov 7 – Caballo State Park, NM](#)

We're parked here at Caballo's Riverside section. There's a great playground that will be utilized lots once the grandkids are here later today.

Denny and I get out at 7 AM. We are following NM-187 along the west side of the Rio Grande and the Battalion's likely route. This area is notable for its chili pepper farming. A couple of processing plants were on the route today. Folks, we are talking TONS of red peppers getting fed onto the conveyor belts while we watched for just a few minutes. This place is serious about peppers.

The big cold front that dumped 4 FEET of snow in the Utah mountains and closed the highways in the Dakotas has finally arrived in New Mexico. The wind was fairly strong last night and continues this AM. It's the first really uncomfortably cold morning we've had so far. I grab the serape that Mark and Pearl Cummings gave me back in Albuquerque to keep myself warm. Thanks guys. It really cuts the wind. However, I didn't realize my ears would hurt from the cold wind. Ouch!

Now, I don't want these comments to sound like I'm complaining. I'm sharing them because it's much more about the realization of the realities the original Battalion faced. We live in Michigan, so COLD

wind is something we deal with every year. But being in period clothing, not having a large wardrobe of thermally protective coats, sweaters, hats, ear muffs and the like, exposes one to the realities of what they experienced – and I guess I should have thought about cold ears, but I didn't. The sun got up quickly today and the wind died down, so no frost nipped ears today, but I will have to wrap my head somehow next time a similar situation arises. How did they deal with cold wind on their ears?

Chris, Vanessa and the kids arrive pulling a camper they rented for the weekend. We help set up, then play all afternoon with the grandkids. Chris and I ride the tandem bike pulling Ethan and Nathan in a bike trailer.

Sure enough, the playground is a hit; swings, jungle gym, slides – but BEST of all for the boys, DIRT! At their home in Texas, it's all mud and rocks. Besides, it's almost always 100+ in the shade, so getting out and playing is not an easy thing to do for much of the year.

The cute girls, Kayla and Samantha help Denny prepare our dinner – Battalion Stew with biscuits and peach cobbler for desert. They even play the part by dressing up pioneer style. So do Chris and Vanessa just for kicks but I suspect the adults are somewhat less excited about pioneer period dress-up.

Tonight, Samantha and Kayla decided they wanted to sleep in the tent with Grandma Denny and Buffalo Bill, so I get to catch up on the blog. Tomorrow will be a "day off" for us. No hiking and not much of a blog entry unless something really neat strikes our noggins.

So, sorry the blog isn't much about Battalion things today – or is it?

What were the reunions like for the men when they returned to their families? It was neat to watch our oldest son pushing our grandkids in the swings. From across the playground, I watched with pure joy to see our first little boy "all growned up", doing the young father things and not having to worry any more about how it would all turn out. It's turning out just fine. And, thinking about it now after midnight, I realize my Dad probably had the same kind of experience. And his father before him, even though he raised his family during the Great Depression and had to send his son off to fight in a World War.

Connected tonight. I feel very connected.

[Saturday, Nov 8 – Caballo State Park, NM](#)

Family day for us. It's brisk and bright. We played games. The girls want to learn to drive their parent's tandem 2-seater bike, so I provide the power and they learn to steer - up front. We go round and around the campsite circle road until they have the basic skills down – and I get to relax somewhat.

Isn't that really how we should teach our kids? We provide the impetus, the resources, the "power" and help them learn to steer – to direct their own lives and to learn leadership abilities so they can help lead others?

It may take multiple rounds of progressively better execution of our instructions – with some occasional lapses of attention leading so scary moments – but they eventually get the hang of it and we can relax.

The kids learn to relax too. It's scary learning new things and having parents (or grandparents or teachers) that "teach too much" or bark orders and criticisms. That kind of teaching makes learning ten times harder than it should be and not nearly as much fun as it can be.

Wish I'd learned those lessons lots earlier. Could have saved my kids and myself some grief. Sorry 'bout that kids.

[Delayed Posts - You had to be here to understand](#)

Tuesday, November 18th, 2008

EDITORS NOTE – As you may infer from our long absence from posting, our lives have been rich this past ten days. We apologize for the slow updates, but as you read through mid-November, perhaps you will understand. – YHS, Kevin

[Sunday, Nov 9 – Caballo State Park, NM](#)

We attend church at Truth or Consequences. Our little entourage boosts their attendance figures for the week, I'm sure. While small, the TorC Branch has some great folks – and some descendants of the original Battalion. It seems we find some everywhere we go.

For the evening, I've was invited to speak and at 6:30 about 20 adults and kids show up for Battalion stories. Some are the Scouts that will hike with us on Tuesday next. Denny tells me later that our kids caught the vision of what we're trying to do with the Trek.

Sorry for the short post. Family time.

[Monday, Nov 10 – Foster's Hole, NM](#)

Karl Wood of Las Cruces has been helping us make arrangements in this area. He's also helped with scouting out the trail for us and directs me to what he feels is correct place to leave the Rio Grande Valley – westward through Montoya Arroyo.

The Peterson trail study back in 1971 didn't have the luxury of knowing exactly where Foster's Hole (aka "The Lost Well") was located. Consequently, that study estimated the 1846 group left the river near present day Hatch. Since the wells location is now known, we can 'backtrack' their directions and distances to better estimate where they departed the Rio Grande. I'm interested in a place a little further upriver from Montoya based upon some of the journal comments.

As Denny drives us down Interstate 25 from Caballo to Hatch, I'm looking out the right side window to the west. Cooke's Peak is in the far distance with Nutt Mountain, Round Mountain and other landmarks in the foreground and changing relative positions as we move south.

BEHOLD! Just as we pull opposite Montoya Arroyo, the major landmarks align almost as if on a spit. Is it possible this is where they left the river? It would make sense for following landmarks, so I follow Karl's advice to hike Montoya to Foster's Hole.

This is a perfect example of why local investigation is essential. From the overhead photos and book research, there's only so much that can be done – only so much that can be understood. So, that's one of the major goals of the Trek, to go get the local experts to share their lessons, to evaluate that information and incorporate it with all the other information and arrive at a better understanding of the Battalion's route and experiences.

Arriving at Fosters in the late afternoon, Denny, Karl and I clamber over the hills photographing and looking at the water basins described by the 1846 group. The Battalion was ecstatic about finding so much "good" water. I'm ecstatic about finally being here, but let me tell you, "good" isn't exactly how I'd describe the water quality. An Eagle Scout project back in the 1990's placed an impressive marker at the Hole and I'm happy to report it hasn't been defaced, vandalized or carried off.

Karl and I discuss the Battalion's final approach to the area. Were they on the ridge north of the Hole or the ridge to the south? Both routes have merit but only a closer examination of the sites will/may provide an answer. Anyone interested in conducting a field trip?

Just at sundown, we pile into Karl's truck and head back down to the Rainbow Ranch headquarters where we are camped for the next couple nights. The scouts from TorC meet us there. They're going to hike with us tomorrow over to Macho Creek spring. We all bed down for the night.

I've got a trivia question: why do clock hands move "clockwise" when the sky moves "counter-clockwise" when looking at Polaris? Since timekeeping is related to the sky, it would seem they should move the same direction. I know that way back when, there were some clocks with hands that did move "counter-clockwise" like the sky. Why did our present method win out over the more logical sky-direction of travel? Would appreciate any insight that could be offered.

[Tuesday, Nov 11 – Macho Creek Spring, NM](#)

Alas! It's the end of a hard hike day.

The Scouts were up early, made breakfast and were joined by some sisters and a mom.

Phil Treadwell, one of the ranch owners stopped by on his way to the pastures. We got introduced and shared details of our plans for the day. Phil is one of those cowboys that actually works his ranch and can do just about anything. Evidence? He, his brothers and a buddy won the 2005 Working Cowboys Rodeo national title. They compete again this coming weekend out in Amarillo Texas.

Off we went, back to Foster's Hole which the TorC group hadn't been to before. We hiked down canyon to the water holes and over and around the area for a couple hours. Then we piled back in the vehicles and returned to the Rainbow Ranch. We grabbed our gear, had a quick potty stop and struck out west for Macho Creek canyon.

Our navigating today was using map and compass based upon my research into the Battalion's route. We know they passed north of Round Mountain and were headed towards Cooke's Peak, but they

detoured to the west to get to water in a small arroyo. The Peterson study of 1971 proposed that Macho Creek was the place the Battalion camped. But was it?

There are three arroyos with flowing streams that could fit the distance estimate. There would have been grass at each. The only difference is that the arroyo we're looking for has the ruins of an old house. It was in ruins when the Battalion passed this way and if we find it, we know it's the canyon they camped at. That's one of my goals here.

The Scouts and families want to hike the historic trail. And hike it they do. We knocked out the twelve miles in about 5 hours and then we all went home – the Scouts back to civilization, Denny and I back to the ranch.

Phil stopped at later with his daughter. We chatted and he told us about their operation. their rodeo work and hopes for the weekend competition. Good luck to the Rainbow Ranch team.

[Wednesday, Nov 12 – Cooke's Spring, NM](#)

In the morning, Jerry heads off to the Hyatt Ranch at Florida (prn: Floor-E-dah, not like the state). Turns out one of the Hyatt's is on team Rainbow Ranch and his grandmother is headed down to see her grandson at the Working Cowboy Rodeo championship.

Back at Macho Creek, Denny and I meet Phil Barrus, one of the owners of the ranch. We explain our project and ask to tour the area to take photos and permission is granted. I also describe the goal of pinning down which canyon matches the journal entries and ask if Phil knows of an old structure that fits the description. He suggests I look down canyon.

Up at the creek, I spend a half hour photographing the area; stream, a small mill dam, leaves on the water, the trees and sky. Working my way upstream, I find a side road and wonder if the old foundation might still be visible on the other side of the creek. Soon I find a NO TRESPASSING sign and after looking over the fence, decide I can't do any better here.

On my way back out, Phil drives up and tells us his father remembered a place matching the description of the old building. We pile into his truck and he takes us to a fairly large pasture, through a fence and to a low mound.

Here we find a set of stones laid out in a square almost exactly 36 feet by 36 feet square. It's kind of exciting to stand exactly where Battalion members stood, to contemplate the purposes of this ruin and to know we've located their camping area. Kind of cool.

After we document the site, Denny heads back to the Hyatt Ranch and I start hiking south along the eastern base of Cooke's Range. This is the first day the trail has been so faint that I've had to resort to using GPS to keep me on track. There are faint shows of what appears to be a road, but only a "ground truth" examination will confirm or refute this trail.

Yep – it's trail. Within the first quarter mile I find old glass fragments. Further on I find a couple of horse shoes. Even further down the trail, it becomes a two-track road but badly overgrown. It seems the BLM is taking the opportunity to try and preserve the area.

Erosion has done a job on this trail, covering some sections by flash floods and by wind eroding the soil and blowing the tracks away. But, enough trail sections exist to make a good “road map” of the probable route from Macho to Cooke’s Spring.

Just as the sun sets, I arrive at the Hyatt Ranch, less than a mile from Cooke’s Spring which we will visit tomorrow.

[Thursday, Nov 13 – Cooke’s Canyon, NM](#)

Denny and I unload the ORV for use today going across Cooke’s Pass. It’s so rough that we dare not take Jerry’s 4-wheel Suburban. Denny hikes while I scout the route ahead. We pass the ruins of Fort Cummings, the pump house of Cooke’s Spring, then head up canyon. She’s trying to preserve my ankles, bless her heart.

Folks, Cooke’s Canyon is almost unbelievable. This pass is steep up, down and sideways. Denny and I are aghast at the thought of pulling wagons through this place. That ten years later the Butterfield Stage route followed the Battalion’s route is equally astounding. SURELY there was a less rigorous route!

We note the grinding holes used by tribal natives, the petroglyphs and the “straight” canyon the Coray’s took a hike in after they camped. It’s not windy today as it was in 1846 when the young couple took an afternoon stroll.

Photography can do a lot of things, but we cannot easily reproduce for others the 3-D spatial relationships that are seen with the human eyes. In short, we cannot do justice to this place. You have to see it to believe it. And, it is so remote that I doubt many Battalion enthusiasts have been here. Their loss. To see this area is to begin to appreciate the magnitude of their building the wagon road. Perhaps someday we can create a virtual reality that can match this place, but it won’t be anytime soon.

There are deeply eroded wagon rut swales paralleling the modern two-track trail. Just below the crest, a boulder field is much like the area the advance pioneering company would have had to deal with, improving the road for the following wagons. Very impressive area.

[Friday, Nov 14 – Mimbres River valley, NM](#)

Last evening, Norm and Anne Erickson arrived from Utah, meeting us at Deming then following us out to Cow Springs Ranch. The ranch will be our base of operations through the weekend.

Anne is the Mormon Battalion Women’s Association president and a descendant of David Pettegrew. Norm is her counterpart. the Mormon Battalion Association’s president. While Denny hikes with Anne, Norm and I ride the ATV back to Cooke’s Canyon. Denny and I discussed it last night and we want them both to see what the original Battalion had to deal with. After we return, I take Anne back to the pass as well. It seemed to impress them as much as it did Denny and I yesterday.

We don't get all the way to the Mimbres River itself. Denny and I get stopped by the lateness of the day, so we hop on the ATV and drive back to highway 180 near Deming. Norm and Anne gather us up and we get back to the ranch very late in the evening.

Our host is a local rancher by the name of Gerry. He's "mostly retired", busy as he ever was and willing to spend hours helping us get to where we want to be. We discuss everything from politics to history to well, whatever. Gerry is gregarious, gracious and just plain good for us – especially Jerry with whom Gerry hits it off quite well. It's the Gerry and Jerry show. These two have so much in common it's fun to watch and listen to them interact.

Sorry for the short blog entries but I'm quite stretched for time to get all the route planning done, entered into the GPS unit, hike what we need to and the other living things. With any luck it will all be in the book.

[Saturday, Nov 15 – Ojo de Vaca, Cow Springs, NM](#)

Today, I hiked a section we didn't do yesterday – but I hiked it backwards – from the west towards the east. This would save many miles of backtracking the vehicle to pick me up – about 70 miles if the property gates were open – but alas, they were not, so hiking it backwards, away from the Cow Spring Ranch was a good choice.

I was on my own for twelve miles of red, sandy soil, yucca plants, mesquite thorns and various cacti. The trail is deeply eroded across this section. The sand is loose, removed easily by both wind and water. Soil has been blown and washed away and with it, much evidence of the old trail.

The surprise of the day was a pack of javelin that I scared up while walking. There were about seven individuals in the group – one of them a fairly large male. Happily we all got along famously but it did set my heart racing for a few minutes. Got a couple great photos.

It was here that Col Cooke had a smoke signal sent to call in local people that might provide some guidance. The Janos (or Yanos as some wrote, but it's pronounced "HAN-ohs"). Road had been a primary Spanish road from the copper, gold and silver mines down to Janos. The trail is almost completely eroded away for most of its length. Gerry says some is visible to the north, but for this trip I don't have time to go see it.

In fact, I'm so busy I don't get to climb the smoke signal mountain. Denny and her dad use the ATV to get a panorama set of photos for us. Happily, I have enough time to get my Saturday shower before church.

[Sunday, Nov 16 – Cow Springs, NM](#)

Church in Deming today.

We make lots of contacts to help us the next couple of weeks. Lots of the folks down here are related in some way which makes for a nice opportunity to get connected across state and national borders. Many

of these good folks and their families have been here for generations and they love their land, what they do and each other. We're privileged to be here and meet them.

Again, I'm sorry for the short shrift blog entry today. Lot's to do and this will have to do for now.

I am YHS -
Kevin

[Monday, Nov 17 – Soldier's Farewell Mountain, NM](#)

Norm and Anne are leaving, heading back to Utah. We will miss them. As a parting gesture, we drive up to the ridge where I believe Col Cooke decided to turn west. In full dress with pack and musket, we take photos of us all in front of Soldier's Farewell mountain where I'll end the day.

There are a MULTITUDE of trails in this area. There are so many traces and partial traces of wagon, 2-tracks, cow trails and the like that it's complete confusion. Gerry Billings has lived here for awhile and after reading the journals, he's of the opinion the Battalion may have gone further south before turning westward. There's merit to his arguments for the route and in keeping with my policy of listening to the local folks, I revised my route last night to look over this possible pathway. There are faint evidences of trail here badly eroded like the Mimbres to Cow Springs section. The wind has done a number on the sandy soils, removing many inches of topsoil. Unless the Battalion's trail was deepened by subsequent use, the forty or so wagons couldn't have made a lasting impression on this place.

I make it over to Thorn Ranch about 3 PM, then drive twenty miles over to Separ for a meeting. Separ is a mostly deserted gas stop along I-10 between Lordsburg and Deming New Mexico. Russ Richins and I go over the maps and the itinerary for his Scouts this coming weekend.

On the way back in the dark, a black cow heads across my line of travel and sadly, I nail the poor thing with the truck before I can stop. The dust cloud was so thick I literally could not see anything for thirty seconds – no wind at all. When the air finally clears, the cow is down along the road and can't get up. There's nothing I can do really, so I offer it my sympathy, get back in the truck and head to camp to tell my sad tale.

Gerry listens, tries to cheer me up and decides he will take care of the cleanup in the morning. I want to help – it's my mess after all, but typical of these ranchers, he runs interference for me with his neighbor, calls the sheriff and makes suggestions for dealing with the insurance company. Apparently, cow strikes are not terribly uncommon out here on the free range but it still is disappointing to kill something even if it's accidental.

[Tuesday, Nov 18 – Separ, NM](#)

This morning was spent cleaning up last night's situation wherein I struck and killed a cow.

This afternoon I've spent catching up on the blog and making preparations down-trail. We help Jerry get the RV ready to move, then head westward, leaving the other Gerry behind. He's been a wonderful host and we have thoroughly enjoyed the time here at Cow Springs.

Denny accomplished all the hiking today and the woman is a trooper. Wind was kicking up in her face at about 10 mph and she's in a pioneer dress. Now mind you, I NEVER asked Denny to come and hike. This was her decision entirely, but I'm grateful she's here and willing to participate in all aspects of the Trek.

[Wednesday, Nov 19 – Coyote Hills, NM](#)

Arrrrrrghhhh!!! We just can't seem to get going in the morning lately.

Between working on route updates, loading routes into the GPS unit, breakfast, equipment repairs, etc., etc., etc., we don't seem to be able to leave before 10 AM.

Now that shouldn't surprise anyone, because even the 1846 group had troubles some days getting started before mid-day. Still, it's a frustration at times and today was one.

Mostly it's because the journals for this area are confusing. Distances don't correlate well and the landmarks are not specific enough to allow us more than a general idea of where they went. Being here should help add some clarity to their descriptions.

Because the few public access roads don't go the directions we need to penetrate the area, we're left to use the ATV to probe into the hills. I thought we were at the Brockman Hills when in fact we were almost in the middle of the Coyote Hills – but I don't figure that out until evening sitting at the computer looking at the images. Just as well, it lays the foundation for our work tomorrow.

In the evening Russ Richins introduces me to the property owner on whose lands we'll be travelling tomorrow. The ranch is fairly large and when I meet Lawrence at 7 PM, he's just finishing his outside work day by trailering some animals. His hands are chewed up and bandaged on every finger from the work he's been doing. I don't normally notice such things, but this is a working cowboy/ranch owner and this life ain't for sissies.

We do the necessary legal paperwork and Lawrence is kind enough to listen as I explain what the men say about their route in the area. The weak spring of water they found (and at which they hardly get any water) is of interest as it will help define their route through the area. There are about five criteria any spring must meet in order to be a possible match.

After explaining the criteria, Lawrence suggests Livingston Spring as the best candidate then takes the time to draw me a map to the location. That is an example of just how well these men know their ranches. They know the history, the locations, the people involved, weather, botany, water flow rates and all the stuff that makes it interesting. And Lawrence cares about it to boot. He's invested – heavily - heart and soul – in this land, his home.

Russ brings me back to Battalion Trek Headquarters and I plop down in front of the computer to realign my hike for tomorrow. Happily, it seems my original plan takes me close to Livingston Spring – in fact, I'd planned on hiking right by it but turning up a different draw after passing it. Tomorrow will tell.

Thursday, Nov 20 – Coyote Hills, NM

Another late start. There were just oodles of things to accomplish this morning and it sucked the entire forenoon. But, it was worth it, because we now have permission to hike an area the Battalion thought was particularly beautiful. AND, while we've decided to not hike in the Republic of Mexico, we have arranged to drive to the significant sites, survey them and get them photographed. In all, it was a productive morning - just frustrating to go so slow.

The complication of finding a legal way in and out of today's area of interest required me to use the ATV again (that's only the sixth time for those of you keeping track). Denny and Jerry checked some other sites while I bumped a few miles to the end of the road. I hop off and start hiking. This place is just a couple miles west of where Denny and I were yesterday when I got off track.

What looks like no progress on the tracking website is WONDERFUL progress. The GPS tracking routes make it seem like we've been going in circles – and in truth, we have.

But those circles have led us to an excellent candidate for a Battalion site. The first water the pilots found after leaving Soldier's Farewell mountain was a weak spring (not a lot of flow) located at the east end of a ridge, didn't have much standing water – enough among the rocks for the officers and their mules but little for the men, was almost in their line of march through the Coyote Hills and finally, the surrounding rocks had holes that could contain some small pools of water after rains. According to the journals, the location should be between 12 and 15 miles from the playas dry lake beds.

Lawrence, one of the property owners, suggested Livingston Spring last night. After hiking my way over a ridgeline that looks too difficult to cross with wagons, I top the saddle and there's the spring, just as described. The spring has been covered and the water piped to a nearby tank, but all the criteria are met, one by one, as I clamber over the rocks, down the arroyo and examine the location.

To me, the interesting thing is that even though my route planning had me go right past this location, without the local expertise and knowledge, I'm not sure I would have recognized this as the possible location they were describing. Lawrence's long experience here made the difference in finding or not finding what was obvious 160 years ago but has been modified so that today, it's not easily seen.

You can see our hiking (and occasional ATV) route at:

<http://share.findmespot.com/shared/faces/viewspots.jsp?glId=0xCzFkSrt4NDE2lxYk2y5qghNC7jJba4>

The time is far spent and with little remaining, I opt to not try crossing the "dry" lake bed. There's been so much moisture this year, I fear the bed is wet and without time to mess around in the mud, we head back to the barn for dinner and to prepare for tomorrow's hike with the Scouts from the area.

Much to do and it's now almost midnight, so I'll post these updates, get a few hours of sleep and report on Sunday about our two day hike over into the Animas Valley.

Kevin

(ps - Gentle Reader, HAD I gone through the wet lake bed late this afternoon, would I now be Mud Blogging?)

[Friday, November 21 – Playas Valley to Animas Valley, NM](#)

The Scouts from Cotton City arrived promptly at 6:15 AM for today's hike. After swearing them in, we drove out to the western edge of Playas Lake, hopped out and got our gear on. The leaders got out their mules and acted as scouts – the route finding kind.

The mesquite, creosote and other “prickley” kinds of plants are prolific here. The “soil” is actually dust of the finest sort being tiny clay particles washed down from the hills and collected in the lake bed which has dried out. The dust is comparable to the Loess Hills clay back in Iowa and Missouri. One can imagine lots of dust in the air as the men hiked and the draft animals pulled the wagons along.

We've planned a two day event here, searching for the route between the Playas and Animas valleys. There are two historical springs along the west side of the dry lake bed. The 1971 route study prefers the southern spring and the pass just north of Rough Mountain. Standing at the springs, one has to question why the original Battalion scouts would have advised to go to Rough Mountain when a much lower pass is visible just slightly north.

In fact, none of us have been hiking this side of the mountain range before. The day slips along and we find we're not going to get through Rough Mountain pass before darkness arrives. The leaders consult the maps and our mule riders head off to see if they can find the route southward. After they leave, one of the youth mentions to me that he knows a route that leads through another canyon just north of our location.

After questioning him a little more, he tells me that his dad manages a ranch on the back side of this range and he (the youth) has been up and down the area a number of times. His description of the area coincides with the maps, so we make a quick decision to hike far enough to see check his other details against “ground truth.”

We drop off a ridge into the next hollow and sure enough, there is the windmill and tanks just as the youth described. We call on the radio over to the mule-men and decide to high-tail it along that route to camp. We arrive just as darkness falls.

The group cooks up a great dinner and we bed down fairly early. It was a long, hard day of hiking uphill almost all the way. Lots of angst also that saps your energy.

Take away lessons for the day:

- 1 – It's important in life to have someone who knows the way as your guide.

2 – Youth sometimes have much to add in terms of experience and knowledge. Don't discount them. Get them involved and listen to them – even if sometimes they're wrong. Often though, they're right.

3 – Follow your instincts. When the planned approach to a problem isn't working out, isn't meeting your needs, think it through and take the best alternative you can find.

4 – Stay together as much as possible. Do tough things together.

[Saturday, November 22 – Rough Mountain, NM](#)

During the night, a coyote came into camp – standing just a few feet from one of the boys. A Great Horned Owl perched in a tree nearby and hooted all night long. It's odd to see them here in the daylight. In Michigan, we rarely see them even at night.

Since we didn't get over Rough Mountain pass yesterday, this morning we discussed whether to hike up the Animas Valley towards Bercham Draw (as originally planned) or go investigate Rough Mountain's north pass. Because the most widely used Battalion trail guide supports a route that isn't the logical one, we decide to see if there's evidence to support that route.

The locals accompanying us tell us that in the early 1960's, a bull-dozer was used to carve a road up to the pass. That modern trail is getting washed away and there is little evidence to support the Battalion traveling this way. Nearly at the saddle, to the left of the road, there is some indication of an older road, but below, where it counts, there is no evidence of trail swales, artifacts, road improvement (such as seen at Cooke's Pass on Nov 13 & 14) or any other consideration that would make this their likely route. Because of the bulldozing, if the trail WAS here, it is buried now, but truthfully, I don't think it was ever here.

If we can find an old map that shows where the period road went, I think we'll have a better feeling about what the truth is concerning this section of the route. We retrace our route back down to camp, catch a lunch, pack up and head back to town.

When I get back to the trailer, I reread the journals VERY carefully – about six days worth of notes and notice that the day AFTER the Battalion marched this section, Colonel Cooke wrote that they had gone over “a low mountain pass.” So, there is good evidence that Rough Mountain is NOT how they crossed the divide and went a more logical way - probably over Whitmire Pass.

[Sunday, November 23 – Cotton City, NM](#)

Attended church at the Cotton City LDS congregation today. This is another one of those congregations and towns of old style ranchers, solid men and women who don't flinch.

After meetings, we shared a pot-luck lunch with many who stayed then we made a Battalion presentation to about 75 folks that endured another hour and a-half of history. Fortunately, most of it was their local history, so they were patient and kind with my ramblings.

One day I will get back here and let them tell me all the things we didn't have time to hear during our quick pass through the Animas valley.

[Monday, November 24 – Sonora, Republic of Mexico](#)

This morning started early as we moved the vehicles to Douglas Arizona. We are "officially" through New Mexico, but will return for one more day of hiking in that state. It's been a wonderful two months of great people, tremendous experiences, interesting history and opportunity to help clarify the Battalion's movements.

My original plan for this week was to hike the section of Sonora between the Guadalupe Canyon exit and Agua Prieta Spring. Recently, there has been increased violence in this area and upon advice of the US Consulate and local persons with cross-border experience, we decide to not hike Sonora. Dang!

Instead, I've hired a local guide with thirty years experience taking tours to the LDS colonies. We discuss our Trek goals and decide that it should be safe to drive the MX-2 highway corridor today. This will allow me to photograph some key locations, to get the "feel" of the locale and see if the previously proposed routes jibe with the journals.

First, we drive out to Guadalupe Pass. Now, here's an IMPORTANT item for those of you interested in the route: Guadalupe Canyon is different from Guadalupe Pass. The pass is NOT in the canyon of the same name. Go figure. It has taken me three years to finally come to that realization.

Guadalupe Canyon is a north-south canyon which they joined after coming down the cliffs off the Animas valley. The canyon the Battalion wanted to go down was further south from where they actually went down. Mexico Highway 2 probably follows closely to their intended route. But, as is well known, the guides didn't find it and Colonel Cooke took the command through a horrifically difficult canyon. More about that later in the week.

The San Bernardino valley is wide and deeper than I imagined it would be. We can't get to the ruins of the rancho, but get some distant photos. Across in the US is the John Slaughter Ranch which is accessible and has sections that still resemble the valley in 1846.

The guide takes me back along MX-2 towards Agua Prieta. We pass one of the campsites and their description accurately portrays the actual geography. It fits well and makes sense that they should have passed this way.

A mild surprise for me is that there is water flowing at Agua Prieta. The town has built up around the spring. There are a few non-east, west, north, south streets that take into account the old stream bed but for the most part it's urbanized. As we approach the stream, there's actually a small amount of water in the bed. Sadly, there's lots of garbage and refuse too, but still, it's kind of neat to see water here. So many places have gone completely dry due to well pumping.

That was a quick drive through, and I appreciated the help and the opportunity to get into Mexico and document some of the sites that do match their descriptions. I didn't get onto the "Capital Gem" mountain, but with luck, I'll get back here someday to find it.

[Tuesday, November 25 – Douglas, AZ](#)

Nothing of importance occurred today. We spent the day planning, catching up on work requiring communication capabilities and preparing for tomorrow's exceptional opportunity to hike part of the route.

In particular, we are excited about the upcoming events in St. David, Tucson, Yuma and wilderness areas of Arizona. Much of our day has been spent in communicating with local folks working on those events.

[Wednesday, November 26 – Somewhere Out There](#)

At the request of the property owners, we will not divulge our hiking location today. We respect their request for privacy and deeply appreciate their kindness towards our little project.

Some general observations from today can be shared.

The three of us, Denny, Mike Bilbo and myself attempted to cram four Battalion hiking days into eight hours. We did not see all we had hoped to see, nor did we hike all the places we desired, but what we did was sufficient to better appreciate the 1846 experience. The high desert plains are marvelous. Surrounded by high mountain chains, they are a fragile environment, but resilient enough that some of the prior abuses are being healed through careful management.

The Battalion's passage with approximately 30 wagons, 400 persons and perhaps 500-700 animals did not have a profound effect on this land. Traces of their route are few and difficult – nearly impossible – to find.

Because alternate routes, better, safer, less demanding routes were located after their passage, some sections of the original Battalion's route have been spared major development. For example, Foster's Hole (aka, the "Lost Well") has probably not been visited by 1,000 persons since its "rediscovery" some twenty years ago. Consequently, it is well preserved and though difficult to visit, one can see it as it basically was 160 years ago.

As a society, we have "loved" some sections of our county nearly to death. Consider Yellowstone National Park. It's unnerving to watch a tourist get into the face of a bull buffalo or to tell their kid to "get closer" for a picture. Fire-rings are everywhere in some forests. A 25-mile stretch of our route in December has been closed because some ATV riders have been indiscriminate in how and where they've gone off road – destroying OUR common history.

Water is everything here. A small surplus means marvelous growth. A small deficiency, if prolonged, will seriously upset the balance. A spring creates luxurious growth on the shaded side of a canyon while the opposite side is baked by strong sunlight each day all year.

We exit the property at sundown as the owner provided us a ride to the gate where Jerry is waiting for us.

While we cannot conclusively claim we have found wagon ruts, swales, artifacts or definite proof of the Battalions' passage, it was a good day and a privilege to hike this ranch. It was wild country back then and it still is today.

[Thursday, November 27 – Douglas, AZ](#)

Thanksgiving Day - as a holiday - had not been declared in 1846, so the original Battalion didn't celebrate as we do now. They were hiking into the modern area of Cloverdale, New Mexico from the area of Bercham Draw. It was about a fifteen mile day and they estimated this distance fairly well. Perhaps it was because the route was mostly flat and they didn't have much pioneering to do, so they could keep to a normal hiking pace.

Our day was spent preparing to participate in a "pot luck" Thanksgiving. The RV owners host an annual Thanksgiving feast and everyone brings a dish. There was tons of food – plenty of leftovers for all. One gentleman said grace before we ate – a five year tradition for him to say the Thanksgiving prayer.

This is an eclectic RV park. It's not fancy, schmancy, but it works for us. The owner is a retired music teacher. Some residents are full-timers, others snowbirds that come most years; a few like us are transients just here for a few days at most. But, we've been welcomed here at Twin Buttes RV Park. It's east of Douglas about twelve miles on highway 80. Check it out. Good rates and good people.

Just south of us is the Elisha Smith gravesite which we will visit Sunday and hold a memorial service to remember him.

[Friday, November 28 – West Paul Spur, AZ](#)

Ours was a quiet day, completing preparations for next week. We were in contact with some of the locales where we will be staying and making arrangements for events.

[Saturday, November 29 – West Paul Spur, AZ](#)

Today I reenacted "Mr Fix-it." Plumbing, electrical, remote electrical help to fix our house in Michigan, cleaning, shopping, etc., were all on my "to do" list.

Early this morning, I had a dream. Normally I wouldn't mention such, but some of the Battalion members relate their dreams, so I'm going to relate this one. It was unusual because I don't remember dreaming often.

In my dream, I was hiking through an area where a hurricane was approaching. It was still calm but the area had evacuated and I found myself alone and seeking shelter. Nearby was a nursing home, so I went in and found many unresponsive patients still in their beds with no one to care for them. After determining there were more people than I could help, I dialed "911" to see if there was anyone coming to take them away. "No," replied the dispatcher, "and you'd better get out of there yourself."

When I woke up, the dream stayed with me and upon considering it some today, I decided it presented me an ethical/moral question; what would I have done if the situation had been real? If I had stayed, how would I have triaged my care? At what point would my life's preservation have taken precedent over the lives of those soon to die anyway?

These are interesting questions because to some extent, some Battalion members were faced with such choices.

Finally, I was able to complete updating the blog and now I'm sending it off to you for your consideration, Gentle Reader.

[Sunday, November 30 – Bisbee, AZ](#)

At the request of a descendant, we attended church at Bisbee Arizona today and after church, we high-tailed it back to Paul Spur so I could give a second presentation for the RV park residents. Surprise! Someone (not us!) had called the newspaper in Sierra Vista and they sent a reporter and photographer. Article tomorrow they say.

We had a dozen folks show. There was even a couple that read about it in the Douglas newspaper and came out just to hear us.

This time, we got the TV and computer to hook up and I was able to show our Google Earth material. It's an "in progress" software to show their route, photos and historic maps that pertain to the area. Really cool stuff.

In this case, since I'd given the background on the Battalion previously, I concentrated on the Cochise County aspects – getting into the area through Guadalupe Canyon, the route along the US/Mexican border, Agua Prieta and Elisha Smith's death. His grave is just a couple miles south of this RV park.

After the presentation, the RV park folks have their weekly pot-luck dinner to which we're invited. We took a fresh fruit salad that Denny cut up. Lots of good food.

Did the Battalion guys swap foods around? Were there favorite cooks? Did they have just one guy do most of the cooking for the mess? How did they parcel out the camp chores? Getting water, wood, cooking, putting up the tent? We have some hints, but not nearly enough details.

[EVENT NOTICES:](#)

Saturday, November 29th, 2008

December 6 (Saturday) 8:00 AM - Site of Old Fairbank, AZ. Day Hike along the San Pedro valley to near St. David. This will be a 14 mile hike. You are invited to come along, but please be prepared with sufficient water, snacks, good shoes and legs that are "broken in" for accomplishing this distance.

December 6 (Saturday) 7:00 PM, the St David Arizona Heritage & Cultural Arts Society will host us for a lecture and camp display. This will be held at the St David School Lansing Auditorium on Highway 80 in St. David. Donations toward preservation of the historic school will be accepted.

December 13 (Saturday) 7:00 PM at the Presidio Tucson city park (Washington and Church St) we will present along with many other living history reenactors. This will be a major event and we highly recommend your attendance if you are in the area.

December 14 (Sunday) 7:00 PM at the LDS Tucson Stake Center. We have been asked to participate on the program commemorating the Battalion.

December 2008

Monday, December 1 – Naco, AZ

<NOTE: BTW, while preparing tonight's entry I noticed I'm still stuck adding "NM" after our locations. Two solid months in one state really gets you in a habit. We are actually in Arizona now and will be until about January 10.>

Denny's got us up and out the door at sunrise today. She wants to knock out the hiking early so we have enough time preparing to move tomorrow. We have a fairly easy day – just 14 miles and along existing roads for the entire distance. Denny hikes almost the entire distance while I work on arranging campsites through Yuma.

The road today winds along the edge of the hills and near the border fence. Coming into the small town of Naco, we start diverging from the border and traveling more northwesterly. A large mountain blocks the way west. A pass lies to the northwest. The San Pedro River is not far away.

At the end of the day, we try once more to locate Elisha Smith's grave. Jerry drives while Denny and I scan the streambed and the hillsides. Finally! We spot a stark white "thing" in the late afternoon sunlight. Putting the binoculars on it, the "thing" seems to match the photo we have of Smith's grave. It's just a little further east than Mike Bilbo and I searched on Thursday, but the afternoon sun makes it stand out brightly today. Don't know how we missed it last week.

Jerry drives us around to the road that borders the US/Mexico boundary. We turn east and just as the sun slips behind the mountain, we drive up to the marker. It sits on the south side of the streambed, halfway up a hillside to the border fence.

In my opinion, we should probably call this site the Elisha Smith memorial because it may not be the actual gravesite. Levi Hancock sketched the location and described the gravesite thusly:

"...his grave is in the road four rods from the creek north side east and west and on a strate [sic – straight] line with two hills one lying on the north one south marked one and two these are all the hills seen from the camp."

Based upon these sketches and the gravesite description, the grave marker placed back in the 1960's does not appear to match the conditions Hancock records. We note that Hancock has been very reliable in his descriptions and his sketches, while rudimentary, are fairly accurate.

We head back to camp for dinner. I make "Shrimp Fra Diavolo" in honor of our son Brian who passes the half-way mark of his mission in MONGOLIA this week. Congratulations Elder Brian. This dish is one of Brian's favorites and we love it too. Our good friends, Adrian and Liana introduced us to it some years ago but it's modified from the traditional recipe. You can look up the regular recipe online if you want. Here's our version. Yum.

Shrimp Fra Diavolo -

Boil thin spaghetti noodles for 4 servings.

In a separate skillet heat –

½ to one cup olive oil

3 diced green onions, some parsley and/or chives

1 – 3 Tsp minced garlic

Add precooked, deveined and thawed shrimp – one pound bag

Cook the shrimp for about 3 minutes, stirring a couple times

Paprika – about 1 Tsp

Red pepper – less than 1 tsp (sometimes we go without any pepper)

Salt and pepper to taste.

Drain the noodles and divide

Top noodles with the shrimp and sauce.

We prefer to serve in a bowl.

As you can tell, we have modified the original recipe quite a bit. Online you can see quite a few variations as well. We kicked off the tomatoes in favor of the paprika. We also go very light on the red peppers. Enjoy!

Tomorrow, we reach the San Pedro. Stay tuned. It will be better than Monday Night Football, I promise.

[Tuesday, December 2 – Hereford, AZ](#)

We have arrived at the San Pedro River valley.

This morning we followed along the valley the Battalion traveled westward, looking for water. The site they camped at near present day Naco was a dry camp; no water. Today the wash had some water, but not much. It would have been sufficient for the Battalion's needs but 1846 had been dry. The rain and snow that fell on December 5th wasn't enough to make a difference for them. The men were getting worn down. The reduced rations, poor water, improper medical care, caring for the animals, road building, camp work, road building, night-time guard duty and the constant unrelenting hiking was taking its toll on their bodies and their mental stamina.

Remarkably, when reading the journals one doesn't get much sense of complaining, and Colonel Cooke NEVER mentions the men complaining – EVER. What that says about the Battalion is perhaps one of its greatest tributes.

This section of our hike is well known for one major reason – the Battle of the Bulls, But more importantly, here, in the San Pedro valley, they had lots of good water, better food supplies for both men and draft animals and the result was that they were strengthened at a critical time – for the hard stretch to Tucson and then to the Gila River. Without the San Pedro valley's abundance, some may not have made it.

A couple of stories about today:

First – after crossing the river, we proceeded up Palominas Road. School had just let out and busses were traveling the road. Denny was hiking behind me. A bus had stopped in front of me and a car behind it. A second car barreled past me and I thought, “Uh-oh! Too fast.” Sure enough, there was a pretty good collision. The bags deployed and people started piling out of the cars. Bus was safe

Long story short – no major injuries; a scalp cut from a hair barrette pushed by the air bag was the worst; some banged knees and a stiff neck. Could have been much worse. Denny and I got to apply our Wilderness First Aid training.

The cause? Mom in the second car took her eyes off the road to look at us in our period clothes. So, Denny and I were the proximal cause of the accident. We kind of feel bad about that.

Second –

When we arrive at the BLM San Pedro House, the staff is kind and does their best to provide a hiking trail map for the valley. We need to know where we can hike and where we shouldn't. Lo and behold! On the wall in a back room are two original maps from 1900 and 1902 that show about half the valley from Hereford to St David. Early roads are depicted and we're talking just 50 years after the Battalion passes and just a couple decades after settlers start arriving. Roads, ranches, mines and other historic locations are there – things I've been looking for the past couple years – right there and all pretty just waiting to be seen. Yippee!

This is yet another example of the importance of GOING where the history is and finding original records. Putting it all together helps it all make more sense. We are excited about sharing these things with folks after the Trek. Stay tuned.

[Wednesday, December 3 – Charleston, AZ](#)

Heading north from the San Pedro house along the river trail, Denny gets “lost” when the trail runs out. We had been told the San Pedro Trail was continuous north from Hereford to near St. David, but that's not the case. Apparently there are a couple of places the trail breaks and coming into Charleston is one. Caught without a proper map (there apparently isn't one available locally), Denny does the smart thing and hikes to the main road. Of course, our cell phones don't work down here in the valley so I have a few anxious moments trying to find my wife. But it all ends well.

Charleston was a mining mill town established much later than “our” Battalion time period. It was a pretty rowdy place and had nearly 10,000 inhabitants in its heyday. Only a few ruins remain – no homes at all. The main road to Tombstone passes by the base of the hill where Charleston existed.

Across the bridge and on the east side of the river is a parking lot. In the lot is one of the large concrete Battalion memorial markers put up in the 1960's by area Scouts. We're told that these were planned as Eagle projects, but that the necessary paperwork wasn't completed correctly, so the monument projects weren't accepted for the boys Eagles. Ouch!

Along our route, we've seen many historic site markers that have been defaced or abused. Some have been stolen. While the San Pedro Battalion markers haven't been immune to damage, they have held up remarkably well. Besides, they're too large and heavy to make off with.

My section of the river to hike had been farmed extensively before being converted back to a wildlife conservation area. In addition to that disruption, the San Pedro River experienced some significant floods during the past 160 years. My impression is that most of the trail in this section has been obliterated. There may be some short remnants along the edge of the bluffs, but there don't seem to be long, easily discerned sections. We're anxious to get the old maps digitized and reevaluate where we might still find original trail.

[Battalion Trek news story](#)

At our Sunday presentation, reporters from "The Herald" newspaper of Sierra Vista Arizona interviewed us and photographed me. See the article at:

<http://www.svherald.com/articles/2008/12/01/news/doc4933835e1be91131439347.txt>

And, e-mail it to a friend if you think it appropriate.

Regards -

Kevin (aka - Ebenezer Brown)

[Thursday, December 4 – Sierra Vista, AZ](#)

The Battalion was physically hurting and getting broken down from not enough food, arduous work and probably a good dose of worry. They were marching at a slower pace averaging less than fifteen miles a day through the San Pedro Valley. Since we're trying to keep close to their schedule, we find we are "ahead" a day – and, needing to help plan future events and camps, we decide to "take a day off." Washing, shopping, e-mails, repairs and other necessities of "life on the road" consume our day.

It's dull, I'm sure, to read that prior paragraph, but I include it because it's a reflection of the real Battalion's experience. On occasion, they just got broken down to a point where things had to be taken care of – wagons, food, rest. And a good commander knows when to push his troops and when to back off and take time to regroup. Every good manager has these experiences.

After experiencing the past few weeks, I'm more impressed than ever with Cooke's leadership and stamina. Imagine, on top of the purely physical endurance required of each person, having to make command decisions (frequently without having what you consider adequate information from the pilots), holding conferences with the pilots and officers at all hours, attending to administrative details, interviewing men who might be spies or with whom you want to be allied, helping to cut deals for purchasing stock and supplies, making up military strategies as you go based upon sketchy information, always looking over your shoulder to see if the Mexicans or Apaches are threatening, trying to train your officers to help their men be adequate in attending to their responsibilities, the pressure of not knowing how badly you're needed in California by the General, hurry, hurry, hurry, and above all, worry -

worrying about your command, worrying about your men, their animals, their food stores, their failing condition, worrying about your wife and children back home and finally, staying up until late hours documenting the day in your official journal, confiding your fears to no one else but posterity because you can't let the men know your inner demons. It had to be herculean. St George truly did have the heart of a Bonaparte.

You may also infer from these comments that the Trek is starting to take its toll on us – and that is true. Denny is much stronger – but then, the women usually are. She keeps going while I'm just about ready to lie down and die. Colonel Cooke stopped early and let the men recuperate after the Battle of the Bulls – and tomorrow we will be passing that area.

We get a nice dinner cooked and retire at a reasonable hour for once. Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz!

[Friday, December 5 – Fairbank, AZ](#)

Val Halford – a reenactor from Salt Lake has joined us for the day. Val hiked with me our first day out of Fort Leavenworth. We plan to examine and hike a section of the San Pedro valley that most believe is the area where the Battle of the Bulls.

But first, we head down to the BLM office to discuss things with staff. Jim Mahoney is a specialist that is going to work with us on our little project. We need help understanding – as much as possible – the old wagon roads the Battalion may have helped define.

We spent the morning with Jim going over the maps, journals and discussing what might be the best options to explore. Jim's early impression was that they went on the east side of the river, but the journals convince us to explore the west bank. The trail of interest bends around the west side of a couple of hills just north of Charleston.

After we'd gone about a half mile, Jim felt sure that it was old wagon road and had never been worked by mechanical means – no road grader had ever been there. After we went another half mile, Jim had to go back to his truck to meet Denny & Jerry to lead them into the exit point – leaving Val and I to keep hiking.

As we went another half mile, we wound up on a short ridge descending into the river valley. This route had looked good on Google Earth, so that's what I'd proposed to hike as the "possible route." Sadly, as we got further on the ridge, it narrowed to just barely wide enough for a car (or a wagon) and on either side, the hill dropped steeply about 70 feet. I remarked to Val that I didn't think the Battalion had come that way – it was too steep, too narrow and didn't impress me as something they would have attempted.

We plowed through the thorny mesquite brambly river bottoms, crossed the San Pedro and got to our pickup point just at sundown. Denny, Jerry and Jim met us and we headed home – fairly happy but disappointed that I hadn't found the trail at this "important" location. The valley has been grazed, mined, farmed, plowed and just about worked to death.

After dinner back at the trailer, I reread the journals for a couple days before the Battle of the Bulls and a couple days after in case I'd missed something. In fact, I'd already read the San Pedro section probably thirty times – but hadn't remembered a short part of Levi Hancock's statement the day after the Battle. He said that on the morning of the Battle after leaving camp, they hiked two miles, descended a short, steep ridge into the bottoms – but the detail I REALLY missed was that both sides of the ridge were very steep – so much so that Levi said it was the worst section of trail they'd seen in the past three weeks.

Huh! The ridge has to be steep and short with steeply sloping sides, leading into the bottoms.

I pull out Google Earth and spend a few minutes searching up and down the area to see if there's any other short ridge with road traces that could be an alternate location, but I don't find any.

And I notice another detail. We know the hunters are out "in front" of the Battalion looking for food and somehow their actions funnel the bulls into the column of men. There's a dry wash to the west that could furnish a natural path to concentrate the animals as they make for the river to escape the hunters.

Based on that minor detail, I've come to believe I ignorantly nailed the approach they took back to the river bottoms and the beginning of the few miles where they were attacked by the bulls.

When we arrive back at the Trek Headquarters (THQ) we're joined by a Tucsonian mother/son pair and a Scout troop from Safford Arizona. We have everyone over to fill out their forms and then it's off to bed because it's a long day tomorrow.

[Saturday, December 6 – St. David, AZ](#)

Everyone has an early reveille – about 6 AM and long before sunrise. It's a very cool morning with frost. After breakfast, we travel to the trail head at Fairbank, "enlist" the group then head on down the trail. Since we have the presentation at St David School tonight, we have to hurry along, cutting out any real efforts to follow original trail except at a few locations. Bushwhacking just isn't in the plan today. We do stop and talk about trails, the Battalion's experiences and some of the mining camp ruins. Dropping into the river bed, we get to cross the San Pedro which shows signs of large floods in the past. Today, it's a small stream, but a constant flow that brings life to this portion of the Sonoran desert.

Presidio Terrenate is a very pleasant surprise having much more to see than I expected. Though almost completely melted away, there are enough adobe ruins to help visualize the original size. The delightfully surprising aspects are the many interpretive signs posted around the compound complete with sketches and diagrams. Terrenate had an elaborate two story main gate facing the San Pedro. Being high up on the rocky bluff, it would have made for a most impressive sight as wagons, dragoons or persons afoot walked between the cliff and the main gate with only about forty feet between wall and cliff.

Unlike Pecos and other missions, Terrenate's chapel didn't get very large. The Apaches never did get too excited about being converted to Christianity, so the padre pretty much just had the Spanish flock to tend. Now that I'm writing this, I wonder if he ever made the attempt to go outside the fortress walls.

Warrant officers from Fort Huachuca (pronounced “Wah-CHEW-ka” and apparently means “thunder mountain”) have placed a simple memorial to the Spanish officers and soldiers who died protecting Terrenate. There were at least four major battles. Three commandants died and at least one hundred men all told. The memorial is all the more touching as these “Americano” officers celebrate and honor their Hispanic counterparts separated by two hundred years plus.

Baptiste Charbonneau reported the ruins to Col Cooke who thought they were the old land grant of San Pedro. It’s unclear whether the Battalion used the old Spanish road as they passed by Terrenate. My impression is that they did not because none of them mention passing so close to the ruins. Perhaps Terrenate is one of the ruins they saw “off to the east” which would place the Battalion trail further west – or maybe they marched through here down in the river bottoms and it’s other ruins they refer to. It’s unclear still and will likely remain so.

At 7 PM, we present to the St David folks. About eighty people supporting restoration of their historic school building come for the show. In the auditorium that’s seen its fair share of Christmas programs, school plays and other events, we get to hook up the computer and show what we’ve been up to. Concentrating on the opportunities for local research, we utilize the Google Earth capabilities and show our “Battle of the Bulls” location interpretation.

The St. David folks have had numerous “experts” over the years tell them all kinds of locations for the Battle, so it’s gratifying that my ideas were well received. Since no one appears to be much in a hurry, we get to ramble on for two hours and then there’s still questions for another 30 minutes before we formally break and pack up for the night.

[Sunday, December 7 – St. David, AZ](#)

We had three choices for church today. We opted for the latest set of meetings that started at 2 PM. It must be saying something about how tired we are after our hiking week. Even at that, it’s hard to keep from dozing off during church – not that the speakers are boring. We are just so tired.

We have a pretty easy evening and some “down time” of talking to family. What a great time to live in. We can communicate at the touch of a button to our loved ones anywhere on the planet. In 1846, the men, women and family members didn’t know the outcome for many months or years in some cases. By the time of the Second World War, my parents were able to get mail within a few weeks or months most of the time and truly urgent information could be telegraphed. My, how times change and for that, I am thankful as we begin this Christmas season.

[Monday, December 8 – Benson, AZ](#)

It’s a short hiking day – just twelve miles into Benson – and it turns out to be a short twelve miles, more like ten. Jerry gets the trailer moved while Denny and I hike.

At Benson, we review the notes for the area, and then drive to see a couple locations. One area is a possible ridge line route further north than is generally accepted as the Battalion route. It’s promising,

particularly as some of the men say they were “under the mountain” which generally means up close to a mountain.

Late in life, James Williams recorded his Battalion experiences from 49 years earlier. James tells a faith promoting story about an exchange between Levi Hancock and David Pettigrew in which Levi sees LDS settlements covering the San Pedro valley. Sadly, it wasn't recorded prior to St David being established.

But the interesting point I want to make is that James says that there near the riverside camp were a couple small hills “behind camp” and on which the story takes place. Indeed, there are a couple small hillocks just west of the San Pedro River where the Butterfield Trail from the east intercepts the San Pedro Wagon Road from the south. Could it be that these hills are the ones James Williams is referring to?

[Tuesday, December 9 – Mescal Arroyo, AZ](#)

It's a tough morning to get going. There's a ton of year-end things we have to do, so our hiking is delayed until early afternoon. (I note that I use that phrase frequently - “tough to get going.”)

Denny and I hike out of Benson to the west-northwest near the railroad tracks for about 15 miles and finish close to Mescal Arroyo. This is where the mounted Mexican soldiers from Tucson met Colonel Cooke and they parlayed to find out what each other's intentions were. Cooke was surprised that the Mexican soldiers at the arroyo didn't seem concerned about the Battalion's approach. He thought they feared the Apaches, but not the Americans. More about that this weekend.

The arroyo was also known for its alcoholic production of its namesake, but those Battalion men who tasted the brew pronounced it “poor stuff.” Apparently some of the men could distinguish between “good stuff” and “poor stuff.”

Our route heads for a low saddle between some low hills. Nothing dramatic today for hiking. It's all a slow uphill to where we will start dropping into the Santa Cruz River valley as we rapidly approach Tucson.

Overhead are aircraft from Davis Monthan Air Force Base. “Tank Buster” A-10 and F-16 fighter jets on training flights are visible almost all day long – in fact, for the past week or two. Jerry and I are airplane geeks. Jerry's a licensed pilot but I've only dreamed.

It's comforting to know there are young men and women learning how to fly in defense of the nation. Thanks to all of you who serve or have served.

[Wednesday, December 10 – Vail, AZ](#)

Denny and I hike more of the trail into Vail (Arizona, not Colorado) while Jerry takes the RV on into Tucson, parking it at the Double V Scout Camp southwest of town. The Council has generously allowed us to camp at Double V for a few days. The camp is a beautiful setting, snuggled up against west side of Cat Mountain which is covered with saguaro cacti every 25 yards or so. Whereas our Michigan Scout

camps are all pine, oak and other big trees, here it's cactus of many varieties. Kind of puts the damper on "midnight chase" and "capture the flag" I bet.

Today we hike around the north side of Mescal arroyo and we get our first sight of some giant Saguaro cacti (pronounced "sa-WAR-oh). They really are beautiful and as tough as nails. Many in this area have endured fires, damage from vandals and long droughts, but most of them are still in fairly good condition.

Colonel Cooke described saguaro this way: *"Another extraordinary variety of cactus was seen which should be called columnar; a straight column thirty feet high, near two feet in diameter, fluted very similarly to the Corinthian column, only the capital wanting; some throw out one or more branches, gracefully curved and then vertical, like the branches of a candelabrum."*

The original Battalion camped without water this night, about fourteen miles east of Tucson. Though Cooke and the men didn't want a battle, they were concerned enough that they prepared for one. In fact, many of them expected to have to fight in order to pass through and obtain supplies.

When Denny and I arrive at the Double V camp, we start to prepare for a fireside. Some Scouts are coming over to learn about the Battalion. A couple period tents are raised, we lay out the soldier's equipment, put up the flag and then I start preparing by cutting the wood and gathering the tinder. When the kids are to arrive in about ten minutes, I start the fire – or at least, I attempt to start the fire. The humidity is high (probably about 15%) and things don't want to catch, so the fire needs a little "coaxing."

I bend into the fire ring with my head and torso, gather a big lung full of air and gently blow onto the tinder. Slowly, slowly it gathers heat from the additional air and within a minute I get some reasonable flames. Just as I start to move my head away from the fire, I hear a "sizzle" sound from somewhere down near my chinny-chin-chin. Being a little slow of mind lately, I wonder what that sound might be – then I think, "Oh NO! It's ME!!! Or, at least, it's my beard – or perhaps more accurately, it's what used to be the left chin portion of my beard. At least I don't have any more split ends on that part. Did you know a beard can get "snarlies?"

The Scouts arrive and I challenge them at musket-point for the password. Someone replies "Joseph Smith" – and that will do. They advance to the fire ring and I attempt a "first person" presentation. This is something I've not tried before, to "be" Ebenezer Brown for thirty consecutive minutes, telling the story as he would, answering the questions as he would, acting as he would. It's hard but the kids are kind.

They are invited to go into the tent where I've placed two blankets with a space between them. When I ask them how many people would occupy a tent, they bite for the obvious number of two. When told that the other three men haven't placed their blankets in position yet, it dawns on them that FIVE fully grown men are going to sleep in that small tent and the Scouts begin to get an appreciation for how close it was. After an hour, they head home.

The full moon is up, the coyotes are yipping, howling and barking over near the fence and as the fire burns out, I gather up my gear and head to bed.

[Thursday, December 11 – Tucson, AZ](#)

Remember Bob Tingey hiking with us way back in Missouri? Bob is coming back for a long weekend. If you don't remember Bob, see the July 25 through August 3 entries to get introduced.

We had planned to “officially arrive” at Tucson today, but Bob got delayed by work, so we've shifted our schedule a day later to wait for his arrival.

So, with my day for research, I run down to the County buildings to track down the old Government Land Office (GLO) surveys and the earliest maps available. After being directed to three offices, I arrive at another building and an office staffed by wonderful folks who gently lead me to a microfiche machine and show me the files I'm interested in.

After a few minutes, I locate the specific cards we need and get hard copies. These are 1873 to 1885 microfiche original county maps showing where the earliest roads, trails and railroads went. After the kind lady makes fifteen copies (only \$1 each page), I head home with a huge grin on my face. Realize folks, that I have in my hand documents that indicate the best places to look for trail remnants that are probably the Battalion's route.

When I have time on the computer and have internet access, I will draw these trail notes into my Google Earth file. Then, since there are some errors in both the original survey and the map, I will have to search – look at the Google Earth images – to see if I can find evidence of the trail where it's supposed to be. And then, I will get to go hike those areas to see if trail still exists.

This is kind of detective work – “which way did they go?” It's challenging and interesting. It's fun to see if I can find something that is subtle. And there are still lots of other aspects to learn about.

Bob arrives late in the evening, we have dinner, get reacquainted, swap some stories and finally head off to sleep.

[Friday, December 12 – Tucson, AZ](#)

We hike Bob Tingey into the city. It is almost all urban growth sprawls – sidewalks, signs, trash (why do people throw trash out?), noise and fumes. We've not been around this for awhile and it's not pleasant.

Bob hikes a couple of short sections of “desert fauna” – creosote bushes and a few small cacti – nothing as pretty as we've been seeing the past few days. We make it almost to city center, then Bob hops into the truck with Jerry who is supporting us. They go ahead to the Presidio to check it out while Denny and I hike the remainder of the way in.

Back in the 90's, a group of folks got busy and built a statue commemorating the Battalion's arrival in Tucson. It's in the park behind the pink county building and though we've heard much about it, Denny and I have not seen it before.

The sculptor has put a lot of detail into the work. Worn out moccasins, holes in the pant knees, shaggy beards. Three men are represented: Teodoro Ramirez, a local Mexican businessman and a community leader trading food for buttons with Jefferson Hunt of the Battalion and Christopher Layton holding the American flag.

Last Tuesday, I promised I would tell more about this story; of how the brave people of Tucson met the brave men of the Mormon Battalion.

One of the folks who have been helping us field the Trek is Margaret Jorgenson. Her Battalion ancestors are Phebe and Ebenezer Brown – the couple that Denny and I represent as we reenact. Margaret also has, on her maternal side, Hispanic and Pima ancestors – from Tucson circa 1846. In fact, some of the families were original settlers of Tucson back in the 1700's.

Her Tucson ancestors have a different perspective on the Mormon Battalion's approach in 1846.

Some Tucson soldiers were sent to investigate this "Americano" army. Were they hostile? Would they destroy the Presidio, their refuge from their enemies? Would terrible things happen to their wives and daughters? Would all their worldly goods be stolen? They reported back that the approaching men did not resemble an army at all – except that they had guns and had demanded the Presidio surrender.

When one thinks about the usual results of an invading force, the prospects for the Tucson compound and people were fairly bleak. They did not know Colonel Cooke's heart or his intentions, nor should they have trusted his statements. The community leaders decided to send all the women and children away for their safety. Since a battle would have destroyed the compound, the soldiers were sent away as well.

A few community leaders remained behind to trade and to seek to have the Presidio spared. These men had great courage to remain as the Battalion approached with guns loaded and bayonets fixed. It was for their families, their homes, their religion and their liberties that prompted them to face possible death. It was a faith that they were doing the right thing – the best thing they could for their families.

For permission to share this story, I thank Margaret and her family. They have done much to promote better relations in Tucson among its people. Such is to be commended and we can learn much from it.

[Saturday, December 13 – Tucson, AZ](#)

We start the day with a six-point-five mile hike along the Santa Cruz River. The trail head for our event is the riverfront linear trail park on the west side of the river bed.

As we hike alongside the river bed, we spot a coyote loping along. He stops, turns back to look at us, then trots further. He looks well fed being a city coyote. It's an unexpected bonus to our day. Of course, we do spot our daily hawk – red tail variety today as most of our hawks are.

Because we're involved in this long-trail hike, other "long distance" events have started catching our interest. Amongst our hikers this morning is nine year-old Kinessa. She and her dad recently participated in a long-distance bike ride. As I recall, it was a 110 mile ride that had to be completed in ten hours or less. Kinessa's dad had to drop out about half-way through, but Kinessa completed the ride. You go girl!

Like the original Battalion, most of whom were under the age of 24, our youth today can and do accomplish many great things. Generally, all we have to do is ask them for their help. They are, for the most part, willing and able to do just about anything. They may need some guidance - not much - but their energy, enthusiasm and optimism is infectious. For me, I enjoy being around our young people.

We have an assortment of Scouts, Scout leaders, parents and siblings along as well. It's a merry group, chatting and talking all along the trail today. Weather is pleasant and in all, it made for a nice morning. The six-point-five miles will count towards our Monday distance.

We hustle back to the Presidio Tucson compound where we will participate in a "luminary" event. The Christmas parade is this evening and we will get to be present in the Presidio compound during the evening's candle-lit reception for the public. It's a beautiful facility and the docents are well informed about their areas.

The Tucson living history group represents Colonial Spanish period. Their military group is practicing setting off their cannon. The commands are given in Spanish and the crowds always love a cannon going "Boom!"

When you get to Tucson, make sure to stop in at this city park which is supported by a separate foundation.

The website is at:

<http://tucsonpresidiotrust.org/>

The city park webpage is at:

http://www.tucsonaz.gov/parksandrec/specialplaces.php#P59_6328

[Sunday, December 14 – Tucson, AZ](#)

Jerry & Bob leave for Utah. Denny and I are alone on our own again for a few days until Peter Guilbert rejoins the Trek. It's hard for Denny and her Dad to be separated again. Hopefully Jerry will return after New Years.

The LDS community in the Tucson region asked us to participate at an evening event commemorating the Battalion. The main speaker was Tim Burton who chaired the statue committee back in the 1970's. Downtown Tucson is the site for a heroic statue recognizing the Hispanic community trading with two members of the original Battalion. See yesterday's entry for more details.

My portion is only 20 minutes, so I concentrate on the thought that we can CHOOSE to fulfill prophecy – such as Brigham Young's prophecy that the Battalion would be held in honorable remembrance. By doing things to keep alive their heritage, we CHOOSE to make Brother Brigham's prophecy fulfilled. Often (at least for me), we don't think about CHOOSING to help prophecy be fulfilled, so this idea has been intriguing to me during the Trek.

When we CHOOSE to obey the “Word of Wisdom” we can lay claim to its blessings and thereby fulfill the prophecy that we can “walk and not be weary, run and not faint.” When we CHOOSE to pay an honest and full tithing we can lay claim to the prophecy that the “windows of heaven” will be opened to us. When we CHOOSE to ... well, you get the idea.

Since every blessing is tied to a law upon which the blessing is based, by CHOOSING to obey we fulfill the conditions attached to the blessing and can lay claim to that blessing. That’s a powerful concept to me.

A couple years ago, I was asked what the “Plan B” was should I not be able to complete the Trek. “What if you break your leg,” was how the question was put to me. “Who will finish the hike?”

My reply was that there was no Plan B. My confidence was and is strong that this event would not have been placed in my heart and head for any other reason than success – that it could be finished. I’m not wearing rose colored glasses; I know the risks involved. We have many contingency plans for injuries, accidents and the like. But as for completing the hike, my confidence is complete that we will see this event through, God willing. We will do our part. The original Battalion did theirs. Should we choose to do less?

[Monday, December 15 – Tangerine Road, AZ](#)

Picking the Juan de Anza trail up at Columbus Park where we finished the day hike on Saturday, we quickly pass the Cannon del Oro river bed. Here the Battalion procured their last “fresh” water (and we use that term loosely because of the salts) before starting for the Gila River some sixty-five miles away. The only water between here and the Gila were a few small puddles of standing water and it must have hardly been drinkable.

In the distance at about 20 miles, we can see the narrow pass to the right of Picacho Peak that leads into the Gila River Valley. We should arrive there tomorrow.

We make camp at an RV park that is literally beside the railroad tracks. Lots of traffic this evening while I do some quick and dirty trail tracing from the GLO maps I picked up in Tucson.

Lo and behold! About a quarter mile north of where I am presently sitting, the map shows that the old trail passes beside and just to the north of the interstate highway. When I check the location on the Google Earth photos, the trail is clearly visible. Tomorrow morning, I will get to hike more original trail. It’s going to be a great morning.

Isn’t technology wonderful? For the second time, we’ve unknowingly chosen a Trek campsite that is literally ON the old trail without knowing it. Kind of funny, don’t you think?

[Tuesday, December 16, Marana, AZ](#)

Ahhh! The joys of year-end tax accounting! I KNOW the original Battalion wasn’t faced with these concerns. What with being gone from our businesses the last half of this year, the economic hurdles we’ve all been subject to this fall and having to make some decisions prior to December 31, Denny and I

are still sitting in the trailer at noon. Still, it's nice to have a fax unit, cell phones, computers hooked to wireless modems and package expeditors at your beck and call.

The original Battalion members had to leave everything in the hands of others. Many of the men had less than two weeks to make their arrangements. Some had less than 24 hours. Brigham Young called some eighty brand new Bishops to take care of Battalion wives and families. Some were better at it than others. It was, after all, a new experience for all of them; the men, the families and those new Bishops most of whom were thrust into a leadership experience they hadn't sought and I suppose in some cases, didn't want. This line of thought leads me back to insights I've had into volunteer organization dynamics, competencies and commitment.

Anyway, I get going on public lands and follow the trail I spotted last night on the photos. This is another of those sections where the wind and rain have removed the topsoil, so the trail that remains is primarily anchored in place by bush and tree roots which hold the sand. Consequently, the trail is more like a series of mounds in a nearly straight line and having bush roots that help hold the sand.

As I hike along, there are in this narrow transportation, communication and commerce corridor, the following:

Old animal trails, native tribal trails, Cooke's Wagon Road, the Emigrant Trail, the Butterfield Stage Coach trail, the early railroad routes, an early automotive road, a later automobile road, the current Interstate carrying both passenger and commerce, a modern railroad bed being expanded, railroad service roads, aircraft routes overhead, satellites in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) and high above us, geostationary satellites, old "smoke signal" fire sites, the earliest transcontinental telegraph route, telephone lines, microwave phone towers, cell phone towers, fiber optic cable lines, radio and television towers, natural gas pipelines and petroleum pipelines. It is a very crowded corridor between Picacho Peak and Newman Peak to the north.

Lest you think I'm being dramatic or stretching the importance of what is in this narrow corridor, remember that Colonel Cooke wrote to Commandant Comodorian at Tucson that he (Cooke) hoped that the wagon road the Battalion was building would be of great value to both the United States and to the Republic of Mexico – a wish that has come true.

It's a very gray afternoon with spritzes of rain every so often. Picacho Peak's north side acts as a windbreak and the lower pressure allows clouds to form against the mountain, giving the peak a mane of white hair streaming away in the breeze. We finish our miles at dark, get some groceries and head back to end our day. The trains gently (but loudly) rock us to sleep.

[Wednesday, December 17, Picacho Peak, AZ](#)

As we progress further from Tucson, the housing developments have given way to agriculture and we see harvested fields to the north. Across the interstate and to the south is Marana Airfield where dozens of full sized jet aircraft – passenger aircraft – are mothballed, shrink wrapped and awaiting a buyer, a leaser or demolition. The dry desert air keeps them preserved so it's a staging area of airplanes that

“could” go back to work but probably won’t. What a waste. Wish I had enough money to be able to buy and run one of them – a young man’s fantasy that probably won’t be fulfilled.

Mid-morning, Peter Guilbert from California rejoins us. Peter is descended from Moses and Edward Wade, father and son who served in the original Battalion. Virginia, Peter’s wife, noticed how excited he was after his Las Vegas to Albuquerque stint with us during October and said, “Why don’t you just finish out the trail from Tucson to San Diego?” Peter didn’t have to have that suggestion made twice. So, it’s at least a threesome again all the way to San Diego.

We pass Picacho Peak just before noon with the old trail off to our right as we head west. When we get to State owned property, we head northward to check out the areas we think may hold original trail remnants. There’s glimpses of it, but the erosion in this area has been really bad for the trails.

Picacho means “peak”, so the name “Picacho Peak” literally translates into “Peak Peak” which is redundant.

It’s a beautiful sunny day with a brisk but pleasantly warm wind. Not too warm and not too cool. Wonderful for this time of year and we really enjoy the day.

After completing our sixteen mile day, we gather up our vehicles and proceed to Maricopa and the home of the Figueroa family who will host our camp for the next week. Bless them; we get to park the trailer under a pole barn complete with electrical power, sewage dump and fresh water. Rain is predicted later in the week and to tell the truth, the trailer isn’t all that “tight” if you know what I mean.

After parking, we begin setting up. As the RV gets plugged into the power outlet, there’s a rather worrisome “zzznatt – pop” sound from the vicinity of the power converter inside the trailer. We open up the door and the smell of ozone/burning plastic is fairly strong. The 110 volt circuits are tripped and some of the wires are charred. Dang! Double Dang!!

After we try a few easy diagnostic things, make a few emergency phone calls, then conclude we won’t have power for the evening, so we cook up an easy meal using the propane stove, use an extension cord to power our necessary items and call for an electrician. After arriving and checking the outlet plug, he promptly informs us the outlet had been incorrectly wired for 220 instead of 120 volts. We fried the microwave, the laser printer and the power converter/charger (hardly Battalion equipment, I admit, but necessary for our work – well, except for the microwave – unless you consider fast popcorn a necessity, which we do).

The great news is that our data backup hard drives were unaffected by the power surge. They contain our photos, research information and just about everything of importance to the Trek. Some of it is back-uped on DVD media, but large portions are single redundant – existing only on the laptops and the backup drives. To lose them - especially our old archives - would be very, very sad.

Denny takes the Suburban over to a repairman who will fix our doors and windows. Oh, I haven’t told you our “other situation” yet, have I?

Well, Jerry's Suburban's doors and windows have progressively gotten worse during the past couple months of severe off-road shaking. Only the driver's controls would work the power windows and locks. Two of the interior door handles would not work – we had to open those doors from the outside.

Then, a couple weeks ago the driver's interior door latch broke and we had to roll the window down in order for the driver to exit. Dangerous, I know, but we planned on fixing it all in the Phoenix area.

Finally, three days ago, the driver's window mechanism broke – fortunately with the window in the up position, but now, we have to climb cross the center console to get out the front passenger's door and then let everyone else out. All other avenues of escape are closed. It really is annoying, but comical dressed in pioneer clothes – Denny especially in her dress, apron and bonnet. You gotta laugh or you'd cry.

Anyway, Richard Mahiai is going to get the Suburban all fixed up while we're in the area and we REALLY appreciate it Richard.

[Thursday, December 18 – Sacaton Peak, AZ](#)

All things are better when viewed in the light of day.

Denny and Peter do the hiking today. I'm delegated to getting repair parts ordered and “finalizing” campsite plans for the remainder of the way to California.

Peter is fresh, so hiking proceeds quickly and they end the day at the border of the Akimel O'odham tribal lands southeast of Sacaton.

In the evening, we head into Mesa for repair pieces/parts, catch some dinner and head back to work on trailer repairs. Sorry for the lack of detail. We hope you understand. Check back for more details in “the Book” that everyone tells me I “have to write.”

[Friday, December 19 – Maricopa, AZ](#)

Peter and I start hiking just about where I calculate the Battalion found some small water holes east of Signal Peak. There's a small drainage channel through the area and under the right conditions, small water holes would fill with highly salty water. In fact, our recent rains have made a number of puddles appear in the desert. It's flat here – very flat. The agricultural use of the land is widespread and we see cotton, old melons and other crops being grown in the area.

The photos of the drainage area we take were from a public road. We have promised to not trespass on tribal lands and we respect the tribal leaders' wishes.

Hiking today brings us even with Sacaton, Arizona by using federal, state and county roads. All told, we won't be able to hike about forty miles of original trail and will miss about 20 miles of makeup distance.

We cross the Battalion's trail just about where they reconnected with General Kearny's trail on the south side of the Gila River. Erosion has turned the Battalion route into a wash, but it's linear and cuts across the natural drainage patterns so the route is discernible.

Again, I'm sad to short you on details, but we're in repair mode for a few more days.

[Saturday, December 20 – Maricopa, AZ](#)

Ha! The replacement convertor and laser printer have arrived so we can begin returning the trailer to functionality.

Here's a big shout out for Dell computers. They were great to us.

We three hikers make quick work of the twelve miles following highway AZ-347 from Pima Butte down to Maricopa, then west on AZ-238 to where we near the trail parallel to our current camp location.

Pima Butte is an interesting area. Besides being a navigation point, the Maricopa Wells were close by providing a reliable source of "fresh" water – though somewhat alkali – for travelers. The Battalion dug here to obtain water. It was a major station on the Butterfield route. In the late 1800's the last battle between American native Indian tribes took place here. It seems a young chief of the Yuma's felt he needed to show his power, so he incited his people against the Akamel O'odohom and Pee Posh (formerly known as the Pima and Maricopa tribes respectively) confederation.

History has it that the Yuma warriors were handed a pretty sound defeat and their young chief didn't return home. One sad side to the story is that the local tribal members asked their Anglos acquaintances to help them against the Yuma's but the whites wouldn't lift a finger. Subsequently, the relations between the two groups were much cooler.

In the afternoon, I got word that my mother and aunt were involved in an accident. Both were banged up some but not very badly. Mom is hospitalized for observation and my aunt is headed home. Worries. Sometimes it's better to be ignorant. There are other challenges our family is facing at this time but we won't burden you with our challenges. You have your own, I'm sure.

In the afternoon, we get to spend a few hours with Rose Ann Tompkins, a local trail researcher who is also a member of OCTA – the Oregon California Trails Association. Rose Ann is very kind to review our trail work and to share hers as well. She helps us clarify some sections that were problematical for us – especially the lower Rio Grande valley. Her group has evidence that General Kearny and the Battalion ranged up to a few miles west of the Rio Grande as they passed the Narrows which is north of the town of Truth or Consequences in New Mexico. We certainly didn't find trail near the river itself.

Rose Ann also encourages us for the upcoming hike into the Gila Valley. It's an area we haven't seen in either high resolution or in the flesh, so understandably, I'm somewhat concerned that we may not have the "best laid plans." She reassures us that our intended route is pretty close and that we won't have "any difficulty" finding and following the trail. I'm not so confident but take her at her word.

Normally I would NEVER do anything like this – go off into what is to me an unknown wilderness area without knowing EXACTLY where I'm going, how far, what the trail conditions are expected to be. Scouts, don't be foolish and do something like this.

In this case, I consider it part of our "research" to determine how difficult it is to find trail, to follow it, to hike it. The pilots had to find trails for the Battalion where trails didn't already exist. There had to be markers used for those following. How would someone find a trail that had already been used but only just a little? So many questions I still have.

By evening, we finish installing the new convertor, power up the system and get our lights and fridge back on. We get to plug in all the stuff we need to use and go out for a celebratory Chinese dinner – we wanted to get some good fortune cookie statements. Then we stop by the LDS Mesa Temple to check out their Christmas displays about the Nativity.

And finally, at the end of the day, the Suburban doors are repaired. Thanks Richard – very much.

[Sunday, December 21 – Maricopa, AZ](#)

Mostly today we spent talking to family scattered far and wide, consoling them and trying to strengthen them in their trying times. It was a somber day for us today.

[Monday, December 22 – Maricopa, AZ](#)

Today we played scouts – guides – pilots. Let me explain.

Later this week we will be hosting an extended family and others who are coming to hike. Ages will range from 4 years to nearly 80 years old. We will be in some of the more remote locations with limited vehicular access. Our commissary must be stocked sufficiently to get us all across the Forty Mile Desert, then through another remote region of the Gila Valley.

The planning weighs heavily upon Denny – she is very good about details and organizing the minute-to-minute aspects of these times. I'm less inclined to sweat the details, so we make a good pair – even if we don't always agree on things.

We rode the trail to the west checking access roads and probing along the route we intend to hike. We did not drive the actual route in a Wilderness Area. It's been closed to vehicles by the BLM because some of the off-roaders have chewed the desert up. BLM hopes that with intensive restoration work, some long-term facility development and better monitoring, this area can be restored and maintained.

In our case, we had to pull an extra "special use" permit so we could take the vehicles with us this week. More paperwork. Yuck.

[Tuesday, December 23 – Maricopa, AZ](#)

Originally, during this week I'd hope to hold cooperative events with the Akamel O'odohom Tribe but apparently things changed over at the tribal government, so the opportunity will have to wait for

another time. Their Huhugam Heritage Center north of Maricopa is beautiful and inspiring. Check it out. Personally, I'm excited to get back over there and do some research.

The Battalion journalists are very complimentary about these tribes – the “River People” as they refer to themselves. Lieutenant Emory – with General Kearny – comments that in some locations, their irrigation efforts had completely emptied the Gila River of water. Considering their lack of “modern” implements like plows and shovels, this represents lots of work by individuals. Their industry must have been impressive to watch. Their cotton was hybridized later to become Pima cotton, one of the worlds' best long-fibered cotton varieties.

We make final preparations to go to the back country, shopping for food, shifting items from the yellow “Hensky” truck over to the RV and rearrange what's left in the cube truck and on the flatbed trailer. This unpacking, repacking, consolidating of equipment and supplies occurred with the original Battalion as well, but in our case we don't have as much of it to do all the time.

Consider this: A fully loaded Army supply wagon could carry about one ton - 2,000 pounds – of cargo.

Question – If the flour ration was one pound per man per day and if the full Battalion – 500 men - were actually eating that amount, how many days would it take to empty a wagon carrying only flour?

Answer – 4 days. That means the Colonel could have gotten rid of a wagon every four days had he been so inclined. He wasn't. You spread around the weight to even the loads. It requires constant packing, repacking and consolidating supplies. At some points, there were more wagons than what could be supported, so Cooke occasionally pulled a wagon out of the line and that freed up more mules to help shoulder the loads. Of course, some of the mules are dying, so there's another reason Cooke had to reduce the number of wagons. It was a logistical nightmare for him.

[Wednesday, December 24 – Maricopa, AZ](#)

Preparations for the upcoming week occupied most of our day. We again scouted the route ahead, confirming sections, evaluating others for safety and/or access, racking up about 215 miles today. This wasn't as rough backroads as have been our other forays into the wilderness, but still, it made for a long day.

We were invited to join a family get-together at the Figueros. There's lots of Mexican food. The tortillas are huge – at least a foot across. There are so many good dishes that I'm afraid I lost all my weight gains. Wait – that's backward. I'm afraid I've gained all my weight loss – or something like that. An early bedtime is in store for us because we have a full day tomorrow.

[Thursday, December 25 – Christmas Camp, Mobile, AZ](#)

Merry Christmas. All of us wish you a wonderful time for family and the opportunity to contemplate the Gift of the Son of God for all mankind. The Savior is truly our advocate with the Father and will heal all our wounds.

Our youngest son, Brian, is currently serving a mission in MONGOLIA. He calls early and we get to talk quite awhile before we begin our day's activities. He sounds good, seems to be working hard/smart and just might miss his family a tad little bit this Christmas. We look forward to having him home next year.

A few minutes before eight AM, we pull into the designated meeting area for today's hike. We will be joined for the next few days by the Wilson family from California. There are ten family members, ranging in age from 8 to 80. They are descended from three Battalion ancestors - Levi Savage, Thomas Karren and Elijah (can't read last name). We "enlist" the Wilson's, issue their packs, muskets and other gear, have them take the Serviceman's Oath, then take off for our adventure together.

We begin at the Gila Reservation's western edge and proceed north to intercept the trail. It's about three-quarters of a mile from the road. We make good time and can view the trail for a couple miles. The trail is expressed here as a line of trees and shrubs growing in the depression left by all the wagons using the Butterfield Stage Route.

About lunchtime and five miles into our planned ten mile hike, the cold front starts closing in from the southwest. The clouds lower and rain can be seen hiding some of the mountain ranges to our front left. It's coming for us. When the rain is about ten minutes off, I call a halt and have everyone gear up. I don't want a repeat of Santa Fe and have people get hypothermia - especially here since we can't get a vehicle into this area to extract anyone.

A drizzle begins the storm but soon gets worse, raining harder and longer than I'd hoped. Within a few minutes, puddles start forming, then rivulets and nearly the entire ground is covered by a sheet of water after a half-hour of steady rain. You don't realize how flat this desert is until the water starts sheeting. Deep spots in the roadway fill with water and we try to dance around them to keep our shoes as dry as possible, but within a very short time all the footwear is thoroughly soaked. My socks start bunching at the toes and I worry that we're going to have a hard time of it.

My real concern is that we have to make it to Christmas Camp – another four or five miles out. Once there, we have to put up the tents and camp. If the ground is as soaked there as it is here, with standing water, well, it will be a very long night for us.

Fortunately, the rain lets up after a couple hours and we arrive at camp with rainbows over our right shoulder. At camp, Owen Garner has set up a shelter. Owen will participate tonight with some of his Battalion buddies. They have put together a Battalion presentation which is kind of unique in its' approach.

To tell the story, they have the visiting group get settled around a campfire, then, the reenactors wander into the brightly lit area to tell their stories. Rather than a script, the pass off questions which stimulates responses, so the pace can quickly change, the topics are free-wheeling and never the same. It's an intriguing way to tell history. Probably wouldn't work in all situations, but here at Christmas Camp, it's effective and interesting.

The tents are up, we've had a stew dinner and been entertained. Now it's time for the sack.

Friday, December 26 – Gila Bend, AZ

This day dawns bright and cold – well down into the 20's and we actually have a little ice in our water barrels. Everyone chips in to get breakfast going, cleaned up, camp broken and packed, then we head off about 10 AM.

Our route today continues to follow the original trail towards Butterfield Pass which lies about six miles to the west, then down towards the Gila River. We are more than halfway through the “Forty Mile Desert.”

Peter takes the first hiking leg. My back is pretty racked, so I drive the ATV ahead carrying the extra water, safety supplies and make sure the route is open after yesterdays deluge. Denny and Bob Church ferry the vehicles around to our next campsite at Painted Rock. Bob is one of the local reenactors from Mesa and has kindly agreed to help us in Jerry's absence. The day would be a lot crazier than it is without Bob's willingness to step in with his time.

Happily, the sun stays out all day, bringing a little direct heating for us – but not much. The breeze is still biting. One can hardly imagine what this must have been like in threadbare clothes, with limited options for protection against the elements.

The Wilson family are troopers. Even the youngest are brave and hike well for most of the day.

At the eastern base of Butterfield Pass, we stop to regroup as the slower hikers bring up the rear, read the Juan de Anza Expedition interpretive panels and snack on our lunches. Then, it's uphill a couple miles through a progressively dense saguaro cacti “forest.” We look for wagon ruts and rust marks but can't find any that are convincing to us.

“Forest” is a loose term for the saguaro filled canyon since the big guys are dozens of yards away from each other, but they are the biggest thing out here and they are more concentrated than any other large item. Interspersed is cholla, teddybear, hedgehog, and other cacti varieties - all of which display an impressive collection of needles. The pass closes in tight on the north and south, leaving us to follow the two-track route west towards the Gila River.

On this day of travel, Levi Hancock noted a new variety of tree they encountered were green, so I assume these are the palo verde trees which have a smooth, green bark and very few leaves to speak of. A few of them are around and their range has spread with irrigation and decorative plantings.

Our original plan was to hike across the Gila Bend area, but we found that about fourteen trail miles have been converted to agricultural fields and then the route crosses part of a reservation we didn't get access to hike. Consequently, at sundown, we load everyone into the support vehicles and exit the wilderness area. We've decided to skip the “uninteresting” section in favor of some miles with significant history on them. The BLM folks sure were good to us and made this section one to remember.

The group pulls into Painted Rock campground slightly before sundown. Everyone knows the routine now so tents go up quickly, dinner is prepared and we get a chance to sit around sharing stories. It's a

relaxing evening telling Trek stories and sharing life experiences. We're all bundled up against the gentle breeze and cold as we sit around the campfire. The night is clear and wonderfully bright with stars but we don't stay up late because tomorrow we get to see some wonderful sites.

[Saturday, December 27 – Oatman Mesa, AZ](#)

This is one of our hiking days that I've anticipated for many months. Today's hikers will pass some historic locations that have come to have deep meaning for me. The Wilson's are joined by other families and individuals who bring our numbers to thirty-six.

To prove how small the world is, one of the Wilson girls roomed at college with one of the Lyman girls. Neither knew the other would be here, but heavens, the squeals of delight when they recognized each other!

We "swear in" the hikers and start down the original trail, passing the Painted Rock petroglyphs, through a short section of agricultural fields and into the Gila River valley at Oatman Flats.

Stopping for lunch under a huge Australian Pine beside an old stone building, we're met by one of the local ranchers and his dad. It turns out they are Battalion descendants.

It was particularly refreshing to hear the young adults chatting together as they hiked and during the lunch break. It's times like this that provide me a direct insight into the workings of the 1846 Battalion – the things they talked about, how they acted, what their hopes were, their fears. The discussions ranged over a wide variety of topics – something I'm sure the "Battalion boys" did as they hiked along.

The Foupp family homesteaded Oatman Flats in the late 1800's. It was and still is a hard area. The Gila River was wild at that time with just some irrigation ditches to help move water around. At the southern edge of the Flats there is a small cemetery started by the Foupp's after a couple of their boys died.

Next, we follow some sketchy instructions to find where the Oatman's are buried – or at least, where some of the Oatmans are buried. In 1851, they were on their way to California and got waylaid by an unhappy band of natives. There is much more to their story than I can possibly relate here and do the story justice. IF I do a book, the story will be enlarged upon in those pages.

Leaving the Oatmans to continue their rest, we hike closer to the volcanic basalt bluff, find a Battalion Trail marker, cross an old Gila River meander, and take a radio call from Denny who says happily, "I think I've found the trail!" She had driven ahead with the equipment truck and found the correct place even though we'd not been there before.

Denny pops her head over the ridgeline and the hiking group winds its way towards her. On Google Earth, this section of trail looks very artificial, but in person, it's apparent the original trail has been undisturbed. Paul Lyman shares his expertise gained from researching the Mormon Handcart Trail. He points out wagon tire ruts, rust stains from slipping wheels and other trail features.

Most of the group gets intimate with the history, touching the basalt rocks smoothed by repeated passages of wagon tires, getting nose-to-nose with the grooves worn in these hard rocks and walking up and down the road cut into the hillside. The rocks are piled to the sides forming a surprisingly wide road and uncharacteristically placed on the side of the hill rather than directly up the front. Examining the structure, it's my belief the hillside had suffered a small landslide forming a natural "cut and fill" structure that the road builders capitalized upon. Every rule has the exception and this is one.

Before sundown, we sit at the Oatman Massacre site to hold a sharing time. Peter shares his history through the Wades. The Willis's share a bit of their ancestors' story. I share the Oatman's background and the decisions that led them to their deaths.

Sadly, twilight comes all too quickly. The non-campers have to exit the area before darkness falls. They have about fifteen miles to go back to the blacktop through a series of poorly marked lava fields. The rest of us put up camp, get dinner and spend another evening around the campfire.

Shortly after sundown in the western sky Venus, Mercury and Jupiter are visible, Mercury being a planet few people ever recognize. It's a nice apparition of Mercury. It's New Moon and we are quite remote from towns, so the night is particularly dark and the skies are brilliant with stars.

The cold is so deep again that most of us head off to bed quite early. It has been an exceptional day.

[Sunday, December 28 – Oatman Mesa, AZ](#)

Previously, I'd been told that services at the closest LDS congregation would start at 11 AM, so we enjoyed a very slow start to our Sunday morning. Gila Bend is over 45 road miles away, so we headed out a little after 10 AM. This is the only Sunday we've decided to attend church services in our 1840's clothing. In general, we feel it would be a distraction to be the only "smelling like campfire smoke pioneers" at church.

This week however, we're far from support vehicles, don't have access to bathing facilities (other than hot water from the camp kettles) and putting on our "Sunday best" would require a dry cleaning to remove the smell we've developed in the past three days.

Upon arriving at the chapel a few minutes before 11, our group of thirteen slipped into a pew as the congregation was singing a song. I really hoped it was the opening song - just a tad early, but from the words spoken during the prayer following the song, it became obvious we had arrived at the END of services. Ouch! All that way for nothing.

But, bless their hearts, the congregation leaders offered to hold a special sacrament service just for us and invited anyone who wanted to stay to do so. While the branch president and his counselor blessed the sacrament, Dow and I were invited to pass the emblems of the Lord's sacrifice to the group. It was an unexpected privilege since we've been on the trail so long.

After the sacrament, we were asked to offer some insights into our experiences. Much of our group expresses a new appreciation for what has gone before and how our few days together has influenced our lives, our perception of this small part of history and how we relate to it.

We make some arrangements for later in the week and head back to camp with gratitude for the kind reception we've had in Gila Bend. It's a small congregation there, but truthfully, many congregations are very similar to Gila Bend; small, busy up to their eyeballs and trying to do the best they can.

Mid-afternoon, the Wilson's get packed up and leave for home. They've come all the way from California to experience some connection to their heritage, both family and religious. We hope they enjoyed their time with us and are safe on their way home.

After dinner, Peter, Denny and I sigh with satisfaction and contented weariness. It's been a very, very busy Christmas week for us and we look forward to a less demanding upcoming week.

[Monday, December 29 – East of Sears Point, AZ](#)

Another cold morning, so we make significant amounts of hot chocolate to get us going. The first priority was to break down camp putting everything back into the Henski truck. Denny drove the Suburban to the main road out, then hiked back a few miles to get the Henski. Meanwhile, Peter and I started out to see just how difficult it would be to follow this section of trail without any maps or guideposts.

The answer to that is that it isn't – and sometimes is – challenging. You may remember that Rose Ann Tompkins had said we wouldn't have "any trouble" following the trail (see the December 20 posting for details). We are hiking a section closely corresponding to their December 30 march. Their route took them south of the Gila River's narrow valley just west of Oatman Flat and up onto the volcanic lava fields. By so doing, they avoided about six river crossings in the canyon. Given the chilly weather they recorded, I can't say I blame them.

For the most part, the trail IS easy to follow. The many basalt lava fields are littered with medium size boulders – about 10-15 inches in size. Wagon wheels wouldn't roll over such, so the men had to pick them up and toss them off the roadway to either side. This process leaves a "clean" pathway about ten to twenty feet wide with almost no sizable rocks.

Another evidence is that many rocks exhibit "bathtub rings" where they had previously been sitting on the ground. Chemical reactions had deposited white carbonate compounds on the rock bottoms, When the rock is rolled over or thrown aside, the bathtub ring of white is exposed – but the group of rocks have a helter-skelter arrangement of the rings. One just has to look for the odd colored rocks on both sides and the trail lies between the lines of rocks.

In some areas, erosion has deposited clay, sand and gravel which covers the ground to a depth exceeding the largest rocks. Consequently, there aren't any rocks for the trail builders to throw aside. Subsequent erosion has removed evidence of the wagon ruts, leaving "gaps" between rocky sections. These areas are where the going gets rough – in terms of finding the route.

For such a cool start, the day turns out to be a very warm. Despite having camel packs full of water, both Peter and I deplete our fluids about 3:30 and start to get a tad dehydrated. Not enough food compounded the uncomfortableness of the day for us.

The Battalion journalists talk about crossing two ridges. We do that too following their trail clearly visible and photograph the cuts in the rocky hill faces. At one, there is an unmarked pioneer grave. Like the Foupp and Oatman gravesites, numerous modern travelers have left small offerings of trinkets, bullets, horseshoes and other items as an “honorable remembrance” of a fellow traveler from the distant past that didn’t make it to his or her destination.

The journalists also comment on having to pull across some sand dunes as part of their day’s journey. We find dunes that could easily be the same ones. They are at the right distance. For the most part they seem to be stabilized with some shrub growth on them. The sand is blown downwind against the southern border of the valley so we speculate the Battalion hugged the southern side of the river.

Denny hikes about three miles ahead of us and is given a ride back to the Suburban by Curtis and Shauna Skousen who we met last week on their parents ranch. After Peter and I exit the wilderness area at 4:30 PM, we join up with Denny at the Suburban, pick up the Henski and beat it back two hours to Maricopa.

We return well after dark, repack our gear – retrieving the equipment we left behind in Maricopa and shuffling things between the various units to be more organized. Again, I marvel at the organizational complications that faced Colonel Cooke and the command staff.

After the repack, we all take a quick shower which is heavenly after so many days in the brush. Denny fixes us a very nice dinner while Peter and I finish up and we prepare to retire nearly at midnight.

Another thing occurs to us this evening as we sat discussing our plans. We are now just one month from completing the hike into San Diego – just one month.

[Tuesday, December 30 – Planning at Dateland, AZ](#)

This morning, we complete our preparations to move the vehicles forward for our next trail section. After catching up on the immediate necessary correspondence, phone calls and interviews, we get on the road late morning.

During the past week as we’ve driven back and forth through Gila Bend, we couldn’t help but notice a shop that advertised their “World Famous Cactus Burgers.” Now, I’m no culinary Rachel Ray, Emeril Lagasse or Julia Childs, but sometimes these strange sounding foods pique my interest. Just so happens that Peter was also intrigued, so we talked Denny into a cactus burger lunch. Hey, it was that or a fast food place and quite frankly, I’ve grown to detest fast food.

And...wouldn’t you know it. I’ve misplaced their business card already so I can’t share the owner’s name. Nice guy though. The place is on the north side of Highway 85 in Gila Bend. I’ll remedy this oversight when I find the card or him on the internet.

Seems they put diced pieces of beaver tail cactus into the ground beef and to tell the truth, it does have a little flavor that one cannot describe. The meat could have used a little more fat – probably was that 93% lean stuff and the cactus couldn’t make up for the juices by itself. Denny felt it too dry also. I don’t

recall Peter saying too much about it. But on the whole, I'd try it again – and it was huge with really good fries.

We hauled the RV to a park at Dateland arriving at 4:30 PM, then spent a quiet evening in the unit working on the upcoming week which promises to get a little hectic again. Well, it WAS quiet between trains. Seems we've successfully found yet another RV park that butts up against a VERY active rail line. About every 20 minutes we experience a 3.0 man-made seismic event. That continues well into the night, but we're so tired we hardly noticed.

[Wednesday, December 31, 2008 - The Lagoon, AZ](#)

Our schedule now matches the original Battalion's march. We are in the same area as they were on this date. However, it was one of those days with a route that prevented us from hiking "straight through" from our start to our end. There are private sections interspersed with public lands and we weren't able to make connections for permission.

Taking the humorously named "Spot Road" northward, Denny drives us in to where she stopped yesterday and we poke around the Sears Point petroglyph area. The journalists do not mention these remarkable native carvings, so we suspect they passed south of the point. Hancock's notes seem to take them along a looping path that way, but I want to see the location and wonder why they didn't go this way.

As Peter and I walk around Sears Point, we notice the site is intriguing from a Native American perspective. After the Trek is over, I'll discuss this site with experts and see if some of our observations are correct. But let me say this; of all the sites we've visited, this one speaks without the benefit of written words to explain it. It is not hard to imagine a young warrior or an old shaman perched up on the bluff trying to communicate with the Great Spirit and Creator. It is a religious location – a temple for the old ones.

As we start westward along the old trail, it becomes apparent that Denny can't safely follow us with the Suburban, so we backtrack out to I-8 and drive westward to the Aztec exit. There, Peter and I unload the ATV and following a different two-track road, drive back out to where we stopped hiking from the east. We will try to connect the two ends but won't have time to hike it consecutively. We'll have to be content with locating the connections if we can. Denny decides to stay at the exit and catch up on her journal.

Driving along the two-track dirt road, my first priority location to document is "The Lagoon", a usual stopping place along the Emigrant Trail and one that seems to correspond to the Battalion campsite for December 31. Some of the journals talk about a "salt pond" which the mules drank from. Some animals died, some were sickened. The men had to hike between a half to a mile and a half to draw fresh water from the river.

The Lagoon is an old oxbow lake – now dry – that formed from a meander of the Gila River. Later journals by emigrants also discuss the Lagoon as being saline – salty water. Subsequent flooding in the

river bottoms has eroded trail sections in the area. There are various opinions about where the Battalion camped; the east, the south or west of the loop. From the journals I've read I'm not sure we can say with certainty which is correct, but given the shape of the Lagoon meander, I favor the southwest side as probably being closer to forage.

We mount up again and drive eastward to where the two track road goes downhill over the basalt cliff. I take some photos while Peter walks further ahead. After a few minutes, Peter radios and excited, "I found the trail." And, sure enough, it's a beauty – a straight up/down hill scar. The modern two-track is right beside the old trail which is still lined with thrown rocks at the top. The clearly visible older route continues uninterrupted for over a half-mile and can be followed back east to where we turned around earlier today. We've successfully connected the dots on this section.

After driving back to Denny's location at Aztec, we grab some lunch and review the maps to determine if we can hike any other sections. Since it's unclear, we ride the ATV out north towards the river, hoping to intercept the trail as it crosses the county road. Sadly, the county road ends and the private road is blocked. Dang!

It was an excellent day with some wonderful insights, great opportunities to document and verify things even if we didn't get to hike too much.

Before it closes at 5 PM, we hustle down to the only store at Dateland, snag some sour cream, chips, milk and other "New Year's" treats. Our celebration – out here, alone in the desert, far away from family and friends, is pretty subdued. We boot the computer and watch a movie on CD. Our thoughts however, are in other places. Happy New Year to one and all.

January 2009

[Thursday, January 1, 2009 – Dateland, AZ](#)

“I wish I could record this day a happy New year but it has proven the reverse for us ...”
- Guy Keysor, Pvt., Co B, January 1, 1847

We begin our day in the vicinity of where Colonel Cooke’s “raft” or “boat” experiment took place – somewhere north of Dateland. The Gila would have been something to see back then; described as having water four feet deep in places and over a hundred yards wide in this section. Today, it is completely dry.

The 1846 journalists soundly criticize Colonel Cooke for his “foolish” attempt to relieve the men and mules of nearly a ton of weight by barging some food and equipment downstream. True, the experiment failed but most people are unaware that back at the Rio Grande River, Cooke selected two Army “pontoon” wagons specifically for this kind of situation. In fact, there is a great story about a Gold Rush emigrant who floated his stuff down the Gila on a custom made, float-able wagon bed. So, Cooke wasn’t crazy to attempt the raft experiment – just unlucky that there wasn’t quite enough water and (given the importance of his remaining food supplies) perhaps a little too quick to move on without confirming that Lt. Stoneman’s efforts would be successful.

Have you ever gone canoeing? Not particularly easy to steer one is it? Well, rafts have even less control than canoes and are almost impossible to control in a tight stream with currents throwing you from one side to the other as the river sweeps around bends. Stoneman – even if HE was an experienced raftman – didn’t have a trained crew of men. The barge was bound to hang up frequently.

The Gila wasn’t particularly different from the Missouri or Mississippi Rivers in navigation respects; lots of sandbars, possibly some tree trunk snags left from floods, and you probably have read how dangerous it was for steamboats on those rivers. Being small, the Gila had less room to navigate. We’re not sure they even had poles to “pole” the raft – at least I can’t remember a reference to how they tried to steer the raft.

One can only imagine Stoneman’s frustration and chagrin in letting down his commander and the men, knowing how important this effort was to the group. Perhaps over the years we’ve been a little too hard on Stoneman too.

The modern government BLM maps indicate the “Historic Trails Corridor” lies down in the river bottoms, but that’s not our route. After the rafts left, the journalists say the rest of the Battalion hiked back up onto the Gila’s south bank and crossed the upland desert. Since Google Earth photography is low resolution for this area, yesterday I downloaded some higher quality photography in hopes of seeing trail evidence. This new data wasn’t available last year during my planning work so it’s double work, but should make the hiking more productive. It seems erosion has taken out many areas of the trail, but enough sections remain visible in the photos to play connect-the-dots.

After punching coordinates for trail parts we can see into our GPS handheld, Denny and Peter hike cross country while I work on some other things today. They aim for the north end of the Mohawk Mountains – a very rugged range about fifteen miles west of Dateland. Crossing the desert on a hot day, the Dynamic Duo do find trail sections, disguised as lines of shrubs growing in the slightly lower wagon swales. For the most part, they are hiking across land just like the Battalion – just a faint trace to follow, largely unspoiled land.

There wasn't much for them to focus on; just go on and on across the "trackless" desert, aiming for the mountain range a full day's hike away. You can imagine the original men hiking along. Trudge, trudge, trudge. Shift the gun from one shoulder to the other. Trudge, trudge, trudge. Take a sip of water from the canteen, Trudge, trudge, trudge. Shift the gun. Trudge. Sip. Trudge. Trudge.

Yet Denny's notes for the day reflect the following: "Saw rabbits, small hawk-like bird, spider sack floating in the air, lots of animal holes [in the ground], deer prints, cat-type prints." So, perhaps it depends upon what one focuses on that determines what one sees. The remainder of her notes for the day relate how difficult it was, being her longest hike and without opportunity to "ride the wagon" since roads rarely intersected the trail. In fact, we only tagged up twice the entire day on the two roads crossing the line of march.

At 4 PM, Peter and Denny head back down into the river bottoms through a small wash we'd identified on the photos as a potential route. The visible trail led to the wash but the details weren't visible. It required "ground truth" examination by our group. As they arrive, Peter identified an old wagon road trace down and it certainly matches our expectations. A fire had previously burned brush in the area helping make their way a little easier in parts, but Denny and Peter still had to plow through lots of mesquite and other thorny thickets.

Finally, they appear and I meet them at the edge of a canal which I can't cross with the truck. Fortunately, there's a narrow spot they can hop across. They've made fourteen miles for today, stopping just once for only fifteen minutes of rest.

Back at camp, we start a charcoal fire and roast hot dogs for dinner. You see, the Henson's have an Annual New Year's Day Cookout and we're loath to break our string of this traditional event. Denny fries cauliflower and onion rings to supplement the dogs. Afterwards, she crashes on the couch, fast asleep. Peter and I clean up from the dinner, make some plans for tomorrow, do a little reading, then head to bed ourselves.

And regarding my quote from Guy Keyser, apparently our day wasn't depressing like his was. True, we were somewhat somber being separated from family, but I think it was much more somber for them.

[Friday, January 2 – Tacna, AZ](#)

It's another "moving day" for us. We package the RV and move it over to Wellton's city park. The City Council has been kind enough to allow us to stay at Butterfield Park through this weekend. More about Wellton later.

After setting up, we backtrack to where Peter and Denny stopped yesterday. Denny follows with the support vehicle while Peter and I pick our way carefully along the north end of the Mohawk Mountain range. The Mohawks are incredibly rough – jagged peaks such as we have not seen at any other range. They are unbelievably rugged with spires and precipitous slopes everywhere.

John Russell Bartlett was Commissioner of the US-Mexico Boundary survey team that traveled this same route in 1857 and he had traveled it before in 1851. He recorded that Cooke's camp was on the east side of the Mohawks and slightly more towards the north end. How did Bartlett know exactly where Cooke had camped a decade earlier? Well, frontiersman Antoine Louroux was Bartlett's guide as well as Cooke's. If you want to read more about Bartlett's experiences, go to:

http://www.google.com/books?id=mmsFAAAQAAJ&dq=lt.+emory+notes+new+mexico&pg=PP1&ots=jdD_M5PsgS&source=in&sig=5-Zf17JUDA5Q5hGdkQAswLXnTNA#PPA331,M1

Sandwiched between the range and the Gila River bottoms which come right up to the base of the hills, we soon spot what we think are original trail remnants. Mostly it looks like two-track now, but there are short parts that still look like they should if part of the Emigrant Trail. After the Battalion, the 49-ers, the military and the Butterfield Stage all followed along this route. Being so heavily used, some of the rock has been eroded deeply. Also complicating this section is that some of the rock is much softer. Shales are tilted on edge, so the rain has its way with the strata. It just doesn't hold up very well. There's not much to see.

After we turn the mountain point, we head southwest following the canal. The canal, for the most part, follows the bluff's edge. And it is ironic that after weeks of desert, we find ourselves next to all the water you can imagine. We are bordered by Sonoran Desert landscapes of the mountains on our left, following an irrigation canal full of water and looking across agricultural fields green with crops in the river bottoms to our right.

While hiking along the canal we see a great blue heron, a few ducks, some fish in the canal and of course, our daily hawk. There is a square mile of property bordered on all four sides with tall palm trees at least fifty feet high all. I think it was going to be a sub-division at one time.

In 1847, the men had to cross Mohawk Valley. Nearly five miles wide, the valley also holds a couple sandy washes and a field of sand dunes blown against the mountain ranges' west side. It's similar to, but much smaller than the dune fields we will see in a few more days.

Along here, the trail is gone, either plowed under, built over or eroded away. Still, the journalists say they were staying on the uplands, so we believe being here on the bluffs edge carries us near the 1847 route. We're between mountains ranges and the Gila valley here is quite broad – four to five miles from bluff to bluff.

Sharing the hiking, the three of us crank out fourteen miles and stop just north of Tacna, a small collection of houses and buildings. Not really a town, per se, but a rural crossroad community. We're headed due west towards Antelope Hill which we will reach tomorrow morning.

Arriving back at Wellton's Butterfield Park, we set up one of the 1846 tents for "show and tell." No sooner do we arrive than an older couple stops by to talk with us for a few minutes. The husband is a descendant and they saw an article about us in the local paper. Finally, we get everything completed for the day, grab some dinner and retire for the night.

Saturday, January 3 – Wellton, AZ

One of our Trek contributors has arrived and will hike with us today. Trace Skeen is a descendant and he is "on fire" with excitement about his Battalion heritage. In fact, Trace is one of those multi-talented people who sings, plays instruments, composes music and probably dances as well, but he didn't demonstrate that for us. But, I fear I get ahead of the story.

Trace contacted us some time ago and offered to support the Trek by providing our medical first aid supplies. We have enjoyed the blessing of having available all the mole-skin for blisters you can imagine. We have been well supplied with band-aids, peroxide, cold packs and all the basic first aid supplies appropriate for our needs. That was something Trace could do because he works with American Medical Response, a global ambulance service company. We thank them and refer you to their website at:

www.amr.net

After Trace arrives and we get introduced, we all pile into the car and drive back to yesterday's stopping point at Tacna. Again, through most of this area the trail has been obliterated by agriculture and river course changes (think "floods"). But still, the geographic view is much as the Battalion would have experienced it.

Hiking along in the bright, brisk morning air, we proceed west about four miles to Antelope Hill. The original Battalion camped here January 4, 1847. The hill sticks out all by itself – an isolated remnant of sandstone. Trace spots one of the "keyhole" Battalion marker so we stop to take a photo op session.

After making camp, a couple of noteworthy events occurred at the hill.

First; Col Cooke was worried about how much food was left, so he ordered an inventory made. Afterwards, some of the men became curious about their personal weight and according to Nathaniel Jones, they "had a weighting frolic." Jones recorded the following: "I weighed 128; weight when I enlisted, 198."

Of all the journal entries about how bad their march was, how much they had to endure, the reduced rations and all the other vicissitudes they had to face, this quote actually scared me. This man has lost more than one-third of his adult body weight – and he still has the worst part of the journey ahead of him.

Second; We know that members of the Battalion climbed Antelope Hill because some wrote about the scenery while others amused themselves by rolling boulders down the talus slope. Apparently it made quite a noise as the rocks crashed downhill.

Peter and I decide to reenact the “boulder rolling” event while Trace judiciously decides to stay lower and provide the videography documentation. After climbing a short way up the steep hill, Peter selects a reasonable looking boulder about a foot in diameter and we give it the old “heave-ho.” It makes a great “Clack – Clack – Clack” sound as it bumps into other boulders, working its’ way down about fifteen feet, then stops. Darn!

Too wimpy, so we look for a rounder candidate and give it another go. This one is MUCH better making nearly fifty feet before sidling up to another boulder that stops its progress. We’re impressed. If we were a little more ambitious, we would climb higher and get a really BIG boulder to roll down upon lesser mortals. HA!

The journalists record there were lots of petroglyphs visible. They still are. At the north end of the hill, there is a set of interpretive panels that help explain the significance of the area – especially regarding its’ importance to the natives.

If you are interested in an explanation of how the Antelope Hill sandstone was used in making matates for grinding foodstuffs, we refer you to the following article:

<http://www.jstor.org/pss/530484>

We follow another canal until we hit a cattle feed lot – the first we pass in a long time, then turn south and pass Radar Hill. The hill had been “dozed” off many years ago, taking petroglyphs and other native artifacts. Without asking anyone, we suppose a radar was positioned there, probably in support of the Yuma Proving Grounds to our north. Not long after, we have another Sheriff Stop. Seems there has been a suspicious brown Suburban vehicle in the area. Hummm. Could that be us?

Eventually, we arrive in Wellton (more about it tomorrow), take a short rest, then start working on dinner. Trace is treating us tonight to a steak dinner. Yumm. His two sisters, Pam and Nancy are coming over from San Diego to let us hear some of the music Trace wrote for his upcoming “Battalion” musical.

Pam and Nancy drive in, bringing all the fixings for dinner which we all enjoy immensely.

We sit around and share stories about our lives and doings, then Pam and Nancy join Trace in singing some of his songs. “The Old Iron Spoon” pokes fun at Doctor Sanderson and is both lively and cute.

“Bring Them Home” is a plaintive piece, symbolizing the prayers of all the women who send their men off to war. Having a son who has served in Kosovo and Iraq, the piece is particularly touching to Denny and I.

“Battalion – the Musical” will be presented at Huntsville, Utah’s Outdoor Theatre on June 26th and 27th, 2009. For more information. Go to the website at:

<http://battalionmusical.blogspot.com>

[Sunday, January 4 – Wellton, AZ](#)

It was a cold night in 1847. It seems at least one of the tent wagons – perhaps Company B's – had been abandoned about this time. Azariah Smith relates that he and his father slept “out of doors.” But, Azariah had an advantage – of a sort, since every advantage comes with a disadvantage as well. Somewhere along the way Azariah had obtained a “Buffalo sack” – a sleeping bag made from a buffalo hide. In it, he slept “as warm as a pig.” One is left to wonder how he transported such a heavy item, and I'm here to tell you, buffalo robes/sacks/bags are heavy by any definition.

We've been fortunate to have a buffalo hide donated for use during the Trek. I had mentioned “Buffalo Bill” back on November 7, but forgot to explain just who Buffalo Bill is. Paul Lyman of our Board of Directors raises bison and shared a hide so we could use it for some research.

Church for us today is at the Wellton Ward and was a slightly different situation. The local membership is fairly short on numbers, but once the cold weather strikes the northern states, the “Snowbirds” migrate south. Here they are called “Winter Visitors” and constitute a fairly large percentage of the people attending services during the winter. Another interesting fact is that you have to speak loudly to be heard. REALLY LOUD.

The Yuma LDS church leadership requested an evening presentation for the adults. Next Sunday, they've scheduled a repeat event for the youth. I'm starting to think about how to condense our experiences into a hour or two. Not an easy task what with all the background plus the photos, having to explain where we are and why this or that site is important. About 150 folks are present and we hang around answering questions afterwards for awhile.

Now, we need to introduce a couple who've become entwined in our lives. Jack and Erlene Bracht have been married since just last October. They travel full-time, selling products at craft fairs, flea markets and have a busy mail-order business that they love. Jack is a history buff and has become interested in our Trek after reading about it in the Yuma paper. In fact, Jack has been shadowing us for a couple days now and refers to himself as a “Trek groupie” – in the good sense, I assure you. The Bracht's are slightly older than middle age and are most gracious and wonderful people. They've invited us to have dinner with them tomorrow night, so more about that in the future.

[Monday, January 5 – Ligurta, AZ](#)

The Dalton family – Brynne, Mike and their 4 kids arrive early to hike with us today. Little Daisy at only seven months old is officially our youngest participant. They are a delightful family. Of course, the boys are boys and enjoy finding rocks, sticks, bugs and everything else along the way. Hiking and history aren't quite interesting to them just yet, but hopefully it will be someday and they will remember this experience. Oldest brother Taylor is 10 years old – just about to become a Boy Scout, so I share some thoughts about the importance of Scouting and how my Scouts inspired this Trek.

We are enjoying the sight of vegetation – and it's EDIBLE vegetation. For the first time in 150 miles we're passing through irrigated fields. After days of brown sand and rocks, the sight of green, red and purple lettuce varieties gladdens the heart. Denny talks to a property owner and is given permission to “glean the fields.” She snags some lettuce for salads.

In the early afternoon, Jerry (Denny's dad) returns after spending holiday time with his family in Salt Lake. It also gave him a chance to see his doctor. Grandma DaNece also came along to see us and we all had a happy roadside meeting. This reminded me of when our friends, the Kruger family, stopped by at Council Bluffs to see us; and when our kids and family members stopped by along the trail for quick visits. These experiences helped me understand the joy felt when Battalion met the Mississippi Saints on the prairie and when they finally returned to their families.

And somehow, I've lost ANOTHER radio. Dang! It's hard to keep track of those little beggars.

Our last part of today's hike takes us northwest to the canal that follows the Butterfield Stage route. As in other places, railroads, power lines and modern roads have mostly obliterated the Immigrant Trail pioneered by the Battalion.

Previously, Jack and Erlene Bracht made arrangements with us for dinner at the Wellton VFW. Jack promised us that they would serve the "Best Hamburgers in the World" (as he talks, Jack can emphasize words just like that). We get back to the trailer in time to "freshen up" somewhat, then head over to the VFW. It's BUSY! There are at least a hundred "snowbirds" all here to get their Monday night hamburger. Truthfully, it is a very good hamburger.

There are other aspects of the Battalion that need research. How about their diet? What kind of caloric intake did they have on quarter rations? What kind of energy expenditure were they making? We know from many sources that the old mountain men had trouble getting enough fat in their diet. A nice juicy burger tonight tastes really good. The Battalion men write frequently about how famished they are even eating four pounds of meat a day. My suspicion is that they weren't getting enough fat. Some fat is essential to our dietary health and this burger fits the bill. Thanks, Jack and Earlene.

To close out our day, Jerry moves the trailer over to a park on the east side of Yuma. We're not expected at the West Wetlands River Park for a couple days but the drive is starting to get long if we don't move. Yuma has lots of trailer parks to accommodate all the snowbirds and truthfully, the park owners "pack 'em in." The lots are small and so are the streets. Pull-throughs are rare. Jerry truly is amazing as a driver. First attempt, in the dark, he slides the RV into a spot so tight I wouldn't have tried it. For this, and many other reasons, we are SO glad to have Dad back with us.

[Tuesday, January 6 – Blaisdell, AZ](#)

Starting our hiking day, we're paralleling the canal. The Butterfield Stage line road is up against the base of the mountains.

A local truck driver stops and talks with Jerry and Denny for awhile. Marvin pulls up again later and presents us with a batch of tangerines off his tree. In the heat, they are succulent and tasty. Marvin will probably never appreciate how much those tangerines refreshed us and how much we appreciated them.

Denny, our family gardener, stops at a "U-Pick" field. She can barely contain herself, so I'll let her describe that experience in "the book."

We round the north point of the Gila Mountains, the first major range east of Yuma as you ascend the Gila River valley. The peaks are much like the Mohawks a few days ago but not quite as sharp. If you want a sample view of how rugged this area is, go to:

<http://www.summitpost.org/mountain/rock/153488/sheep-mountain.html>

The canal attracts wildlife. Denny walks to within about 15 feet from a Blue Heron before it takes flight. Two hawks circle us overhead – always a good omen. We don't see convincing trail today but the contrasts between lack of and abundance of water is a forceful reminder of parables in the Bible, clear and convincing examples of how small things matter.

It's an easy day and we make good time into the east side of Yuma valley. All day long as we hike we hear strong "booms" from the north where the Yuma Proving Grounds is located. Peter and I decide we'd really like to get to see what's being tested out there. Munitions of some sort. General Kearny had some mountain howitzers (small cannons). We suspect the stuff being tested is a little more powerful.

In fact, in the evening, Peter and I are standing outside and we see a series of flashes refracting over the northern horizon – in the Proving Grounds. It's not a single flash; it's a string of flashes – moving across a distance. We start counting seconds (5 seconds per mile of distance, like lightning) and we determine that whatever is being tested is about fifteen miles away. The shock wave is a long, rolling thunder. We're treated to three such bombing runs. Our tax dollars at work.

[Wednesday, January 7 – Yuma, AZ](#)

Denny and Peter take the hiking responsibilities for the day while I work at the trailer office. With all the upcoming presentations and events we're to participate with, I need some time to organize myself. So, being largely ignorant of what went on, I defer to Denny's notes for the day.

Ospreys, Great Blue Herons, White Egrets and other birds are seen. Back in 1847, a pelican was shot and its crop made into a hat for one of the men. Denny notes the wide variety of irrigated crops being raised in the valley and the great industry it is to pack them for market.

At noon, they meet one of Peter's friends from California, Benton Sealy. Benton is a former military pilot, so he and Jerry hit it off. The hiking crew goes off for lunch at a famous Yuma restaurant (while I slave away at the trailer – mutter, mutter) and finish their walk just short of the Colorado River.

Returning to the trailer, we've made arrangements to go to a movie – "Valkarie" – our first in months. Being history buffs, we know the outcome before we start, but the details we were ignorant of. The importance of a single individual standing up and taking action regardless of what anyone else may do is a strong message.

Darryl Montgomery, who recently published a monograph on the Battalion route in Yuma County, stops by and we chew over various details. Darryl's work in the area is a great example of how a local person can use local materials to research and add to the Battalion story. Darryl's article; "The Mormon Battalion in Present-day Yuma County" may be obtained at:

<http://www.usarmyofthewest.org/Articles/MormonBattalionInYumaCounty.pdf>

Darryl and I interpret the campsite dates somewhat differently – by one day. This is probably a function of whether you think the journalist is writing in the morning about the prior day or writing at the end of the day to describe how his current day went. It's not a serious issue and I look forward to further discussions, research and discoveries to help clarify these points. Darryl is quite the gentleman and he's doing a great service for the Battalion.

In fact, Darryl's "Yuma County" article is similar to the Santa Fe Trail county map we noted back in Kansas's Marion County (August 25 blog post). A little longer, and it has photographs, but something that could easily be produced and distributed in nearly every county along the route. Each county has a "Visitors Bureau", Chamber of Commerce, tourism board Historical Society or similar group that functions to share the local history. It wouldn't cost much and could help spur local interest in the Battalion.

[Thursday, January 8 – Yuma, AZ](#)

Well, officially, Peter and I reached the Colorado River today. We hiked only three miles to arrive at the Pilot Knob Emigrant Crossing – which the Battalion may or may not have used. Downstream a few miles is the crossing location used by General Kearny, but uncertainty exists as to whether the Battalion crossed down there or up here at the west end of 8th Street. There's one of the Arizona "keyhole" Mormon Battalion Trail Markers right at the water's edge.

Most of the river water has been bled off for irrigation purposes, so there's not a lot of water as there was in 1846. What does flow here is clear and cold – taken from behind dams on the Colorado River, so all the sediment is pretty much settled out upstream somewhere. It's a "cleaner" water – at least from the standpoint of clarity. I can't speak about dissolved minerals and chemicals. Along the river banks are canes, tamarisk and some cottonwoods.

The journalists describe the river as being a few feet deep in some sections - deep enough to float the small mules and allow the wagons to be floated. Nearly a mile from the east bank put-in to the west bank take-out downstream, the crossing was very difficult. The water was cold - made more so by the cold air temperatures. In the morning, the ice was said to be an inch thick along still water sections.

Late at night, Mark Woodbury arrives from St. George Utah. Mark and I served as missionaries in Bay City Michigan some thirty-three years ago. Mark is a Scouter also, so we've lots in common. It's so late that we briefly rejoice at seeing each other after so many years, then I show Mark to his "deluxe" accommodations in one of our tents. We've pitched them next to the Battalion monument in anticipation of tomorrow's event and visitors, but for now, it's really late (about 1 AM) and it's time for bed.

[Friday, January 9 - Yuma, AZ](#)

We begin our morning before sunrise as the city parks crew finished preparations for the memorial service. The "Army of the West" – the local Yuma Battalion commemorative group – shows up and we

get the chairs and all the other stuff ready. There are breakfast burritos – not those “fast food” types. These are locally made, authentic American breakfast burros. Yum.

At 9 AM there are about 75 folks that show for the commemoration service. We speak some and share our thoughts on being here - finally - at the Colorado River crossing. One main thought keeps coming to me: Just three weeks left to San Diego.

And yet, the Battalion was about to commence a march through the most inhospitable area they had to face. Almost no water. Temperature extremes. Food rations almost completely gone. The draft animals were giving out. Many tents have been abandoned. They are almost at their limit – but not quite. The next week would take them there – to the edge. And quite honestly, the prospect scares me.

Peter, Mark, Denny and I – as well as the Army of the West reenactors are able to interact with the local folks. Many stop to talk about the tents, the equipment, the guns and our experiences. It’s a fun morning.

In the late afternoon, Peter, Mark and I say goodbye to Denny and Jerry, then drive into California, west of Calixco. Here, we’re to meet and hike with some Scouts. It’s an annual event for the Imperial Council to hike about fifteen miles along the Immigrant Trail. It’s a thirty year tradition commemorating the Battalion’s passage. The Scouts earn a historic trails award and learn a lot of lessons.

We start soon after dark. Our instructions: “Hike towards the white glow on the horizon – not the yellow glow.” And off we go with the thirty plus hikers into the desert. It’s an interesting experience. For Mark and I, our Scoutmaster brains take over and at first we worry about the apparent lack of safety factors. After awhile, we calm down and start enjoying the experience, trying to learn the Battalion lessons we came here for. And, I should mention, this is not a criticism of the event organizers. They have a great safety record to show for their work.

We’re in full Battalion regalia tonight for this hike; white belts, pack, blanket, clothing, canteen, musket. Only one thing – the Scouts won’t let us carry our muskets. The REALLY want to carry the guns, so we let them. Most trade off, but one young man carries a musket the full ten miles during our night walk. The packs get progressively heavier, more uncomfortable, irritating our shoulders and backs.

Eventually, we reach the fire, get some hot chocolate and bed down in the sand with our bags and blankets. It’s a cold, bright night with the full moon getting into my eyes every time I roll over.

[Saturday, January 10 - Yuma, AZ](#)

We’re up at sunrise. There are lots of “bodies” lying on the ground. It’s cold – but not for long. We’re off and hiking another five or six miles to where we will get breakfast. The day hiking is a lot less fun. The sun gets quite warm. We’re low on water and food.

Our final destination is not well defined for us – just a general direction to take. Very much like the Battalion’s experience – just go ahead; go ahead.

All safely arrive by 10:30 AM, are fed a good breakfast and then return to our vehicle. Off we go, back to Yuma. It must be how the men felt who were sent back to rescue the food from the barge experiment. "What? Go BACKWARDS! Hike it again? NOOOOO!!!!!"

Upon our return, we clean up, get some grub and I start working on my presentation for tomorrow night. It's a busy day. Denny and Jerry have done the wash, shopping and cooking to help get us taken care of - and I appreciate it very much.

[Sunday, January 11 - Yuma, AZ](#)

Francisco, the guide who is mentioned in connection with the Colorado River crossing area, is another of the Battalion's entourage whose history is shadowed by an unfortunate lack of details.

Who was Francisco?

Here at the Colorado River crossing near modern-day Yuma, Colonel Cooke relates that a Maricopa guide named Francisco plays an important part in helping Cooke get the Battalion across.

We find in Bartlett's 1857 Survey Report, that his group had interaction with a young Maricopa chief whose name was Francisco.

I shan't detail more at this time, but it's my belief that the Battalion guide and Bartlett's "Francisco" is the same person. Perhaps someone can help find more information about Francisco?

In the evening, we provide a program for the Yuma LDS youth. Jack and Erlene show up – bless their hearts. They've driven all over the area taking care of and encouraging us. Not wanting to repeat myself all the time, it's kind of good to have to make new presentations. It forces me to present material in a different way rather than being stale and doing the same presentation every time.

One thing that chapped me though: one of the young women was asked to conduct the music. Sadly, she hadn't had any instruction to speak of and it showed - both in her ability and in her countenance. What REALLY set me off was the fact that some of the other young women were snickering at the conductors' efforts.

It was another busy weekend. Another weekend that has left us more exhausted than before. So much for the "Day of rest" concept. We're looking forward to completing the Trek.

[Monday, January 12 - Gordon's Well, CA](#)

By golly, we're in California! There are only 18 days remaining until we reach San Diego (officially) and it's almost unbelievable to us that we have reached the "Golden State."

The original plan was to hike this week as close to the original trail in Mexico and the same schedule as the 1847 Battalion members did. Sadly, it just isn't going to work out that way for us.

1 – Again, we've been counseled by local law enforcement and knowledgeable locals that it is not advisable to hike in Mexico at this time. Given my experience in Sonora, I'm convinced the perceived

danger is much higher than the real danger, but I will go along with the advice at this time. We can document the area later.

2 – Staying north of the international border, we find the Border Patrol has closed the area immediately beside the “fence” (built with your tax dollars may I remind you) due to drug trafficking. Seems the border fence isn’t high enough to prevent drug runners from chucking parcels of drugs over the fence. An accomplice on the U.S. side of the border grabs the package of drugs and skadoodles off to sell the bad stuff (which of course means we need more police, lawyers, courts and jails).

Well, “It’s OK” I tell myself and the others “because there’s always the All American Canal access road we can hike.”

3 – Oops! The All American Canal is being rebuilt and its access road has been closed to public traffic.

< Kevin exhales a long, heavy sigh of exasperation and a mild case of defeatism >

On the positive side of today, as we cross into California, we reset our clocks to Pacific Time, thereby gaining an extra hour. “Pacific” means “peaceful” and I intend to be “peaceful” for an additional hour tomorrow morning.

And, if those two reasons aren’t enough reason to be happy, we start hiking near the small “new age” town of “Felicity” which means “great happiness” or “bliss.” The California Legislature, has officially recognized Felicity as the “Center of the World.” There’s a “cosmic pyramid” of sorts, a “Stairway to Nowhere” (a spiral staircase taken from the Eiffel Tower and most appropriately named in this current setting), a collection of memorials and of course, a gift shop. It must be California’s version of a Florida Tourist Trap.

Enough ranting and rambling – you’re interested in the Battalion’s experiences.

Wherever the Battalion crossed the Colorado River, the journalists all are definite that the Imperial Sand Dune field was on their right hand and clearly visible. These dunes look just like the Sahara Desert dunes. Heck – most movies you’ve seen with desert dunes were shot here, so you know exactly what they look like. But movies and TV doesn’t do justice to the visual sweep of this much sand all around you.

We are actually crossing the dunes – or more accurately, hiking the roads that cross the dunes. These mobile dunes (meaning the wind is still moving them around) are up to 300 feet tall here at the pass. The strong prevailing winds from the northwest have piled up the eroded sand against the base of these eastern rock mountains. It’s an Off Highway Vehicle Paradise. Folks come from VERY far away to play here with their ATV’s, motorcycles, sand rails and anything else that will work in sand.

In 1847, the Battalion said they avoided these dunes and travelled further south around the “toe” of these dunes – inside the borders of modern Mexico’s state of Baja. The route there is also “down” – lower off the base mesa that forms the foundation upon which the dunes move.

As they hiked, the men and women would have looked up to the north – off their right shoulders – with a certain degree of apprehension to see these tall, light tan dunes that stretch for miles and miles away to the northwest. From their lower altitude, the visual effect would have emphasized the apparent height. Mountains of rock are scary, but you can get wagons over them. Mountains of sand you had to go through would make you weep because wagon wheels would sink into the sand, your feet would sink and slip on the hills – and you just would despair at the thought of having to drag the wagons through even a short distance. Way back on the Rio Grande the Battalion had their first experience of “wagon draggin” and they didn’t think much of it.

After about seven miles of dunes, we break out onto the base mesa again. It’s made of Colorado River sediments washed down from the Colorado River Plateau to the northeast. Small rocks, cobbles and lots of sand are our roadway. This is the same kind of terrain the Battalion hiked. There is scattered mesquite, creosote and a few other plants, but no cacti to see here. It’s too dry.” Forbidding” is much too polite to describe the area.

Off to our left – the south – we parallel the All American Canal’s route. It carries a large percentage of what water hasn’t been allocated to Arizona, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, other sections of California and the Republic of Mexico. The canal is some forty feet wide, nearly as deep and seems to be about half-full with a healthy flow of water going hither and yon. There are a couple small power generating plants that sit astride the canal, making it work all the harder before it escapes its confines. We squeeze every last ounce of work out of the Colorado River before we let it go.

After our allocated seventeen miles for today, we end our hiking next to our campsite – one of the few times we are able to do that. The RV is parked at Gordon’s Well and we are able to quickly set up, have dinner and spend some time planning for our upcoming week.

[Tuesday, January 13 – North of the Border, CA](#)

“North of the Border” isn’t a town; it’s a state of mind – or something like that. If you’re following our progress by map, there’s not a town we can refer you to. We’re halfway between Yuma and Calexico following highway 98.

We continue westward, a few miles north of Cooke’s Wells – originally known as “First Well” as they left the Colorado River. First Well existed long before the Battalion’s time. They just enlarged it and dug at least one more well at the site. Subsequent farming, flooding and erosion have erased all surface traces of Cooke’s Wells, but, if you’re interested in seeing the location in Google Earth, enter latitude 32.669200° and longitude -114.926800° which will show you the place historians say was the wells’ site.

I may have told this story before, but a person corresponding from El Paso Texas keeps asserting that the Battalion “never went into Mexico.” I keep reminding him that ALL of this area was Mexico in 1847 – in fact, until 1858 and the Gadsden Purchase. Actually the Battalion’s route did slip into the modern Republic of Mexico and let’s just let it rest at that, shall we?

On the morning they left these wells, the Battalion went a short distance northwest and then climbed up onto the mesa on which we have been hiking. So, our topography, fauna, flora and view is almost exactly the same as theirs – we’re just separated by a few miles and an international border fence. Well – for the purists, it’s true that some of the plants and animals have changed since 1847, but essentially things are the same up here on the desert. Except for the flood of 1905-06 – but more about that another day.

After seventeen miles, Peter, Denny and I arrive at the eastern end of Calexico’s agricultural fields which are like Yuma’s. Here is where the Colorado River water makes its power known today. The variety and amount of produce grown is staggering and it all depends upon using the Colorado. Without this water, the area would remain much as it did in 1847, with little vegetation and almost no inhabitants. It is intensive farming with irrigation pipes, canals, field labor, numerous specialized farm vehicles, fertilizers and lots of other stuff I’m ignorant of. I just know it is an impressive display of efficient farming that helps us have a high standard of living at a comparatively low price.

[Wednesday, January 14 – West of Calexico, CA](#)

Peter and I get a VERY early start, before sunrise, and knock out our sixteen miles very quickly. This brings us back even with Signal Mountain where we hiked with the Scouts last Friday night and Saturday morning.

Early in today’s hike, we arrive in the Imperial Valley agricultural zone – where the canals have made the desert “blossom as the rose.” All around us are fields of produce; lettuce of many varieties, broccoli, cauliflower and other winter crops. Alfalfa is being cut. Bales of hay are stacked – hundreds of feet long. Dairy farms and some small cattle feed lots are nearby. The canals deliver water to the crops which transpire it into the air raising the local humidity and carrying scents of the land and crops.

The smells today are incredible. Fresh air – clean and crisp, slightly humid, then as we walk, these various smells, subtle but seemingly strong because of their novelty to us after so long in the remote areas, makes us aware of just how far from a normal existence we’ve been for weeks at a time.

It has been a good day to be alive.

[Thursday, January 15 – El Centro, CA](#)

Tomorrow, we will embark on the last portions of the “90 Mile Desert” which nearly killed some of the Battalion.

This is a preparation day for us. For the next full week, we will be in remote sections. We need to shop, fill the water tanks, finish scouting the route and prepare for the last desert leg of our journey. We also have continuing fallout from the financial crisis to deal with. Poor Denny. It really frustrates her. Me too.

About noon, Terry Wirth arrives at El Centro. We pick him up, get gassed up and head out for a reconnaissance tour from Carrizo Creek westward. But you need to know how important Terry is to this story.

Terry has spent about fifteen years correlating Battalion locations and putting them into mapping software. We first made contact at Fort Leavenworth in early 2006 as I just started making plans to hike the trail.

Terry was using a road mapping program, the same software I used for my business back in Michigan. Terry was kind enough to share his road file with me. Consequently, from my perspective, Terry Wirth is the “father” of Battalion electronic mapping methods. Thanks for all your work and encouragement, Terry.

We take I-8 west to pickup California highway S-2 (aka, “Old Imperial Highway” and “Sweeny Pass Road”) headed northwest. As we reach the crest area just before the switchbacks head down, a panoramic view to the northeast opens up. We can see a hundred miles, down into Carrizo canyon, to the creek bottoms and all the mountains surrounding. Being 750 feet above the valley, it’s almost like being in a light aircraft. We can trace parts of our expected route for the next two days. The view is stunningly beautiful and detailed.

But, as we’re interested in knowing how close our support vehicles can get to us in case of emergency, we head down into the valley. We also need to let a Scout group how to meet us tomorrow night. To save time, Jerry decides to leave the port-a-potty trailer attached to us – and off we go, down bumpy, back country dirt roads.

I won’t tell the whole story here in the blog, but we had lots of fun down in Carrizo Creek. We were lucky (VERY lucky) to get out before nightfall, but we had fun.

Denny feeds us a good meal then heads back to the store for some more items. I spend the evening entering GPS coordinates into the hand-held unit so we will have some checkpoints to hit along our hike. Somewhere about midnight, we finally pile into bed for a few hours of sleep.

[Friday, January 16 – Carrizo Creek, CA](#)

Promptly at 5 AM, the alarms start going off. Everyone turns to, grabs some simple breakfast and helps pack the RV for travel. Jerry will transport the RV to Mason Valley where the Jenson family is going to host our home base for a few days.

While Jerry starts westward, Denny drives us out to Plaster City where Peter and I ended the overnight hike last Saturday. That’s where we pick up the Immigrant Trail an hour after sunrise – and an hour late.

This area is old dry lake bed. The desert floor is all dust – not like the basalt lava roadway a couple weeks ago where the road is visible because of rocks being moved. The trail here is literally, dust on dust. There’s no contrast difference to see for long stretches. That’s why it’s so hard to find the trail on the photographs – no contrast; it all looks the same. Only where there’s a rut in the valley floor can we tell where the trail exists.

As they left the Colorado River, they faced a week of travel to the next reliable water source at Carrizo Creek. In between, just a few small wells from which to hopefully obtain water. It was very different for a small group of travelers to get enough water – a few people and a few animals wouldn't drain the well.

But consider the water needs for nearly 400 men plus at least twice that many animals – hundreds of gallons would be needed. Water obtained at Cooke's (First) Wells got them through the first couple days. The next well was very poor. Alamo Mocho wasn't much better and the next well – didn't do much at all.

Where we are, there was no water source for the next twenty plus miles. Some men didn't have canteens anymore – lost or broken. Some didn't have blankets and the nights were cold.

We cross the railroad tracks and start hiking northwest. There are some back roads here and racing trucks go tearing by leaving dust trails pointing out their route. We make much less fuss and dust.

Our route today crosses two stretches that require permission: The first from the Navy as we cross their active bombing range; the second, from the State of California as we cross the old "inactive" portion of the bombing range. Back in the 1960's, the Navy deeded back a seven mile stretch of the trail to the State. Sadly, there are still times when "live" bombs are found. One man was killed by a previously unexploded bomb some years back, so that's why permission must be obtained – and it's rarely given due to the dangers to Park staff as well as the hikers.

We have special dispensations to hike here today.

As we reach the Anza-Borrego State Park boundary, we meet our escort across the old bombing range. Ranger Steve of California State Parks points out the situation is so dangerous that any adult with a child caught in the posted area will be referred to Child Services for child endangerment. Ouch! They are serious.

Meanwhile, we find some serious trail sections, in particular a downhill slope for the wagons. It gets "hot" – probably in the mid-70's. We exhaust our water. Ranger Steve keeps us moving. The ground is so light colored it hurts the eyes. I'm glad I have my sunglasses today. There are gypsum (selenite) crystals all over the ground, reflecting light like thousands of broken glass shards.

About 3:30 PM, we leave the "forbidden zone" and enter the thickets associated with Carrizo Creek. The water flow isn't very much; just a few inches deep, some pooling in the two-track roadway and highly distasteful. I collected a sample yesterday and hope to determine the salt concentration levels.

Denny is waiting for us at 4 PM when we get to the water we cached yesterday afternoon. We refill and drink all we want. She drops off our food, equipment and camping gear for the night. Our last major tasks for the day are to get dinner, meet the Scouts and bed down.

Since we're practicing "Leave No Trace" philosophy with our backwoods camps, we break out our propane stove and cook dinner. Joining us as we eat is a small kit fox. She's cute and comes within a few feet of us. Inquisitive little fox.

Sundown is early – 4:30 PM; we’re only a few weeks past the shortest day of the year. Dinner is served in the dark, prepare our beds and look anxiously for the Scouts. After 8 PM, it becomes clear we’ve not met up as expected, so we bow to the elements, crawl into our nice warm sleeping bags, enjoy the moonless Milky Way for awhile and quickly go to sleep.

[Saturday, January 17 – Vallecito Spring, CA](#)

Up before sunrise, Terry, Peter and I rehydrate a hot breakfast and pack our stuff. We’d arranged to extract our overnight gear with the Scouts, but since they didn’t show last night, we cache our gear off the trail and away from the two-track road.

We finish filling our water bottles, put on our packs and just as we’re ready to start walking, the Scoutmasters drive up. They’re a couple miles off, so we pile into the Scoutmaster’s truck and drive over to their campsite. We’re all introduced, make ready to hike and start off up canyon.

The road markings are all goofy to us. “The Great Overland Stage Route of 1849.” Harrumph! The stages didn’t roll until the mid-1850’s and we left the DeAnza Trail yesterday. If not properly called “The 1847 Mormon Battalion Route” it should be called the “Gold Rush Trail of 1849” or the “Immigrant Trail.” As a joke, someone in the past planted a street corner sign in the desert – “Hollywood and Vine.”

A little after noon, we arrive at Palm Spring, No – not “that” Palm Spring. The Battalion’s Palm Spring is in Carrizo Canyon and in 1847 was a small spring surrounded by palm trees. Someone has manufactured a “replica” spring, collecting the water in a man-made basin. There are some non-native palms planted to simulate what the area looked like long ago. Still, poking around in the underbrush, it’s evident there were a series of small springs here. Lots of salt efflorescence on the ground at a number of locations.

The opportunity for some shade from the sun must have been a welcome experience. It’s fairly warm, strong sun and no breeze. Slightly uncomfortable – but then I’m not carrying a musket, pack (or bedroll for many of the original Battalion) and we have opportunity for all the water we want. We’re not at the end of a 90-mile, limited water, limited food experience.

As I had anticipated, this area, more than any other, excites my imagination. The land is the same. The route is under our feet. The journal entries are very specific and describe what they experienced – no, endured here. Their ghosts are at my elbow, in front of my eyes and I can only shake my head in disbelief over the difficulty. Over the course of years, hundreds of less well prepared and led people must have died following this route. The dream of “easy money”, “GOLD”, and a fool’s paradise must have been a siren song that led many to their death on this trail. It’s a miracle none of the Battalion died here.

They record that they followed the dry wash up canyon. Of course. There’s no reason not to. No boulders. No plants in the way. The sand is fairly firm, so why not follow the obviously easy path?

Today the trail slowly climbs from 600 feet to 1500 feet above sea level. Not a big climb, but for starved, dehydrated animals and men, it wasn’t easy at all. Mountains are piled upon each other, rising to over 5,000 feet within three miles, surrounding the hikers except for the narrow valley ahead and behind.

Back at Cooke's Wells, the Colonel describes the danger they are in and gives his reasons for pressing forward boldly. There was nothing behind them. They didn't have the water or the food to linger. They had to push here to Vallecito Spring. We had a great dinner awaiting us. They had almost nothing.

The sun is behind the mountains as Peter and I reach the restored Butterfield Stage Station at the County Park. Denny meets us and drives us forward to Mason Valley where we'll be camping at the Jenson's ranch.

We put up three tents and make a small formal campsite. Peter takes one tent, Terry the second and Denny and I take the third.

It's cloudless, crisp and cool. A little snow from the big Christmas Eve storm is still visible in some of the crags high on the peaks south of us. The Milky Way glows, but we know our time in the wilderness is about to end because we can also see reflected light from some cities intruding into the darkness.

Late in the evening, our son Jonathon drives in from San Diego to spend a few days with us on the trail.

[Sunday, January 18 – Mason Valley, CA](#)

Church for us today is at Julian. It's a small, touristy kind of place. It was a gold rush town with some diggings in the area.

The congregation is kind and we have a good Sabbath meeting.

We hang out with the Jenson's today. Retired couple; former restaurant owners, trying to become very self-sufficient out here in Mason Valley.

Pardon the lack of detail. Kind of a day off for us. We'll put more in "the book."

[Monday, January 19 – Box Canyon, CA](#)

Our hiker group gets a jump on the day – our long awaited passage through Box Canyon. We start by heading up canyon from Vallecito Spring Park for a few miles following the dry stream bed. There are LOTS of cholla cacti – the kind that has a barb on the end, like a porcupine quill, so they stick and hold. Ouch! Jon and I fall prey to some and it's so funny we're almost helpless from laughing as we pass the spines back and forth between us as we try to get them out of each other. Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby comes to mind. It's quite humorous and we have a good laugh.

This same morning in 1846, Colonel Cooke was worried about California's confused situation. Were they still at risk for battle or not? Therefore, they marched in formation, "with more military order."

We arrive at the base of a very big hill. BIG. It blocks almost the entire valley. Campbell's Grade is the modern automobile road across the "rugged ridge ... some two hundred feet high" that stymied the Battalion's guides. When guide Pauline Weaver reported that he didn't think they could get across, the good Colonel replied (with "warm words" and quite "haughtily", I should think) with a subtle but very telling compliment towards the Battalion's men.

Cooke wrote, "I ordered him to find a crossing, or I should send a company who would soon do it."

In other words, if the "professional mountain men guides" couldn't find the way across the hill, Cooke had complete confidence that he could select from among the Battalion companies and that the Mormon boys would accomplish the task – "soon." It's a very subtle clue to how Cooke has come to view his command of men. He trusted them to be able to accomplish just about anything he could ask them to do.

Within a couple of hours the large boulders had been moved, a primitive road made for others to follow and using ropes, all eight remaining wagons were across the hill, entering what we now call Mason Valley. My presumption is that they took lunch there, then moved forward to the next set of challenges at Box Canyon.

The original narrow spots where they had to take crowbar and ax to the rock are gone. Dynamite was used to widen the stream bed for stagecoaches and later, early automobiles. Terry Wirth is going to return and see if he can identify exactly where that section is located.

As we hike further, we arrive at the waterfall that most folks confuse for the rocks they had to cut through. They are mistaken. Cooke said it was the "narrower pass" they had to avoid. The "narrower pass" waterfall is downhill from the parking lot where an interpretive panel almost gets the story right.

Across the dry stream bed from the interpretive panel are a series of trails climbing diagonally northward up the hillside. The two lower trails are "cut and fill" roads. These have had lots of work to create and maintain them. The interpretive panel says the lower is the Butterfield Trail and that the upper is the Battalion's route. We don't think that's correct.

A more recent interpretation is that the lower trail is in fact, the first automobile road from the early 1900's. The next higher "cut and fill" trail is now believed to be the Butterfield route. It certainly is not the Battalion's route.

To find the Battalion route, you have to remember that wagons have to go straight uphill on steep slopes. There are two eroded wagon road segments above the two "cut and fill" routes. These, we believe, are remnants of the oldest Battalion and Gold Rush period wagon roads.

At the base of the three road hill was the "great rock to be broken" before the wagons could ascend the hill. Cooke kept moving back and forth from one work site to the other. Taking ax in hand – something few military leaders of the day would do – he worked side by side with the men to show them what had to be done to get the wagons through.

Wouldn't you just love to have been able to see that sight? After the Colorado Desert crossing, almost at the end of their last rations, with bodies gaunt from deprivation, nearly naked and weary from lack of sleep, they were carving a lasting testimony into "living rock."

I'm sure the sight made the angels weep.

[Tuesday, January 20 – Warner Pass, CA](#)

We stop back at the “three trail hill” to catch some photos with better lighting, then drive over to what is known as “Little Pass” or “Foot and Walker Pass.” Here we sit in the car and listen to President Barak Obama’s inaugural speech. “Sacrifice” was a major theme, one our Battalion predecessors understood very well by the time they arrived at this place. It’s a great speech and calls us all to do better for each other.

This is a mini version of Campbell Grade which we passed on Monday. It’s only fifty feet high or so, but still a formidable barrier. One explanation is that “Foot and Walker” means the stagecoach passengers had to get out and hike across the hill being too difficult for the animals to carry a loaded wagon.

The old trail is visible paralleling highway S-2 as we draw close to Scissors crossing, the site of the San Filipe village in 1847. Journalists indicate only a few deserted native dwellings near where they stopped to water the animals. The marsh was nearly eight miles from where they spent the prior cold night with little fuel and completely without water after passing the Box Canyon. They killed two beeves which they had to eat without salt – or much of anything else with nearly all rations depleted. Still, there was a little flour left in camp, because Levi Hancock says he got nearly a pound from the assistant commissarian.

As we walk along we cross the Pacific Coast Trail, our “Big Brother” trail that goes north-south along the mountain crests. Now, that’s a trail I don’t think I’d ever attempt. I’m not that rugged.

We pass Paroli Spring, the “brisk running stream” near where the 1847 camp was located for this night. No flowing water anymore; it’s been tapped for farming and the road crosses the old waterbed. And just about here, we start seeing stands of the “live oak” trees which gave joy to the Battalion. There are acorns – long, slender ones. Levi Hancock and others used them to supplement their rations. The area starts showing signs of green – even at this early time of year. Colonel Cooke drilled the men at the campsite while waiting for the wagons to arrive.

The guide Jean Baptiste Charbonneau returned this night from San Diego “with others” carrying information about the military situation and supplies. Due to his report, Cooke decides to press for Los Angeles rather than San Diego. It’s significant because from here, there’s a fairly direct animal path to San Diego. With this strategic decision that Cooke explains in his journal, the Battalion will head north-westward towards Temecula.

Our hike takes us to the pass above Paroli Spring camp. We can see somewhat into the Warners’ Spring area where we will be tomorrow night.

It’s been Peter, Jon, Terry and I most of the day. Denny hiked some and we got strung out along the highway – typically walking in pairs. Terry tells Denny that he’s enjoyed his days with us. It’s given him time to reflect and it hasn’t been chaotic for him. Well, I’m glad someone doesn’t think it’s been chaotic!

Part of our evening is spent preparing to move tomorrow to our next camp area. Southern California – especially San Diego County – doesn’t have many places for our little gypsy caravan. Deb and Duane

Jenson have us for dinner and some table games. It has been a very pleasant time here for us. No pressure and lots of tender loving care. Thanks Deb and Duane. We've appreciated it very much.

[Wednesday, January 21 – Warner Springs, CA](#)

We break camp and pack up the vehicles – our fairly faithful “wagons.” Our son Jon and Terry Wirth leave us for San Diego and home. Another division of our Trek personnel. One can better appreciate the original Battalion's concerns when they were divided – small groups being sent into the wilderness with little food, equipment or protection. “Traumatic” seems too strong a word for us today, but I can't help but wonder if that's how it felt to them.

It's all downhill from here. We're descending from the mountains towards the coastal region and into San Diego. Peter starts hiking at Warner Pass all alone. The weather forecast for tonight and tomorrow says “buckets of rain.” Our planned camp for tonight is on dirt roads in Warner's valley so we're worried about getting stuck with the heavy vehicles. Having to be towed out of a pasture at Pawnee Rock in Kansas has made us mud shy.

Denny, Jerry and I go looking for an alternate place to put the RV tonight. There are few RV parks in the area for us vagabonds. Back and forth we go, up one road then another. We talk to locals. We call (when the phones work) various parks and camps. Jerry and I wait while Denny checks a side canyon ten miles in the opposite direction from where we're headed. Frustrating.

Colonel Cooke wrote about his days like this – the guides not sure about the best route, not knowing where to find water or forage for the animals. You can camp almost anywhere, but finding a “great” camp is no easy task while finding one “on the fly” is probably more than doubly hard.

Eventually, Denny arranges for the big rigs to proceed to the next planned camp down the road while Peter and I will do our primitive camp at Warners'.

It's one of those days we REALLY needed a volunteer to help revise our arrangements. It pulls us off the trail and the opportunity to make some sense of things. Happily, the trail is known through here, so we're not crippled in our efforts to find it. Peter is hiking the route, maintaining our Trek's continuity.

By the time we get things puzzled out, Peter has nearly arrived at our period camp for tonight. It was a straight shot down S-2 to the crossing. The valley is broad, grassy and I think this is another area that looks substantially as it did in 1847. Herds of cattle are here as back then. Fewer natives though. We didn't see any today. To the north, Mount Palomar catches some sun between the gathering gray clouds, the observatory domes bright in sunlight.

Once Peter arrives, we unload our equipment from the yellow Henski truck, then Denny drives it away, leaving Peter and I quite alone out in the pasture. We place the tent on a high spot with the door downwind. With its' US flag flying in the breeze the tent looks very small out here. One can image about forty tents and nearly 400 men making a much more imposing presence in this place. They were down to just eight wagons.

For fun, I decide to use cow pies as our fuel to cook dinner. I'd wanted to do this ever since entering Kansas, but the opportunity just never arose at a convenient time. Tonight is the LAST opportunity on the trail to pull off this "experiment", so I get motivated, gather a bunch of chips and start them burning.

The "old ways" – sometimes called "primitive technology" – isn't something I think we should all "go back to." At the same time, I always marvel at the simple answers that exist for most of our needs. The cow pies – even though not completely desiccated as buffalo chips would have been on the plains – burn hot and make short work of cooking. They were faster than charcoal. I'd intellectually expected them to work, but I'm surprised they work so well and they weren't even "optimum" examples. Goes to show how "in touch with nature" our ancestors were.

The night promises to be cold and wet, so Peter and I wrap up in our blankets and snuggle down into our bags for the night.

[Thursday, January 22 – Aguanga, CA](#)

For the record, it's pronounced, "ah-Wong-gah", which, in the local Indian dialect apparently means "dog-place."

Happily, the rain held off with just a few spritzes during the night. But it is quite cold this morning – around freezing and quite damp. The humidity is frighteningly high compared to what we've experienced ever since Dodge City back in Kansas and four months ago. Very chilling even with a serape to help.

Back in 1847, at least one of the Battalion had thrown away even his blanket to save weight. He recounted that he would wake up in the night and have to "rub and roll" himself to stay warm. I'm not going to reenact that particular journal entry.

As soon as Denny arrives with the yellow truck, we pack things away and trade for Jerry's Suburban with the toilet trailer. Peter and I leap-frog hike through the valley courtesy of the Vista Water District which owns the land now. The staff was most helpful and encouraging towards our little project.

Remember the "Battle of the Cows" back in Iowa? See blog entry for July 8 if you don't. It seems our reputation has somehow been telepathically communicated from herd to herd all across the Southwest. Denny was surrounded by a herd in New Mexico back on September 25 (I didn't write about THAT one in the blog), and today we are beset by the herd here at Warners.

Peter dropped the vehicle and started hiking. By the time I arrived at the truck a few minutes later, it was swarmed with bovines that did not look happy. They were on the other side of a gate, so I climbed up and "shoo-ed" them from a respectable distance. They were not impressed and continued to mill around the truck. In fact, I could see that they were mauling the truck. That was distressing because of how much Jerry loves his Suburban. So, I climbed across the fence, started waving my hat and making "cowboy noises" like I knew what I was doing. Happily, cows aren't able to distinguish bluff from substance and casually moved off away from the vehicles.

Yech! Bovine nostril and oral slime – all OVER the Suburban. The cows licked and boogered the windows, mirrors, doors and tires of Jerry’s truck. He is NOT going to be happy about this. Me? I just plain grossed out. Told you - I’m a city kid.

And on that happy note, Denny took up the driving responsibility. Kurt Castro and Don Smith from the ranch and Vista WD caught up with us and we shared our respective histories.

Warner’s was the keyhole entrance into southern California. Historically, there were a couple Spanish/Mexican land grants that nearly everyone passed through into the area. Hiking through the valley, you can see why. It’s the confluence of three routes. The hot springs are here. It’s lush and wet. The land is greener here than we’ve seen since eastern Kansas. The mountains that surround the area seem to protect it.

The oak trees along our route have dropped their long, thin acorns. Historically the Luiseno Indians made into an acorn mush they called “wee-wish.” Perhaps it was such a meal that healed Levi Hancock of his “gravely bowel complaint” back in 1847.

Returning to highway 79, we proceed northwest towards Temecula valley, passing the old stagecoach station at Oak Grove along the Butterfield stage route that came through here in the 1850’s. Off to our left is Mount Palomar Observatory, home of the 200-inch Hale Telescope and a bunch of smaller ‘scopes. We can see the protective white domes in the sunlight. I’ve loved that place ever since fifth grade when I read its story. Another juxtaposition of time-space and history for me.

The old trail seems to cut both left and right of the highway and isn’t very apparent for most of the day. But every once in awhile, a stretch appears that just “looks right.” Dr. Anne Miller is a local historian who is researching the early survey maps for the area trying to determine where the trail is located. Anne has been very helpful and will be important to our passage through the next 40 miles or so.

Our evening is spent as the guest of Mary Halley and the Rancho California RV Park. The Park is part of the Outdoor RV Parks of America chain. Anne Miller joins us in the evening for a presentation at the community center. About twenty folks show up and we have a good time sharing the Battalion story. The Park was wonderful to us and it is a beautiful community for folks who live the RV lifestyle. Manager Brian Boersma graciously provided for all our needs and took good care of us. We are most appreciative of the kindness shown to us.

[Friday, January 23 – Temecula, CA](#)

Early in the morning some residents of Rancho California RV Park stop for photos at the period tent we had set up. We take some time to discuss our project and the importance of the Battalion to “early California” history. That phrase is somewhat funny to me since the Spanish arrived in 1769 and the tribes were here a very, very long time before that.

It’s a gray morning. The clouds are low – and lowering. It’s apparent there is a possibility of rain today. The peaks are socked in and it’s damp. Peter and I set out following CA-79 to the northwest expecting to arrive at long last in Temecula.

I almost catch a truck bumper on a hill and curve. Hiking facing traffic where there isn't much apron is kind of scary. When I start to cross the road to be more visible, I look back to check the other side as I step into the road. Peter on the other side already sees the truck I can't and yells. I jump back and just avoid what would have been a pretty disastrous event. Whew! Thanks Peter – VERY much.

Which...makes one think about all the times the Battalion men were pulling wagons up and down hills, river banks, across rock-strewn areas and all the other dangerous locations. Not to mention that horses, mules, oxen and the food "on the hoof" animals (cattle and sheep) all have a mind all their own. One never could be sure what they were going to do. Kind of dangerous – easy to get killed out here on the trail.

Pioneer journals have numerous stories of men, women and children getting in the way and being run over by wagon wheels or animals. The result usually was death. Medical care was primitive. I just read a Winter Quarters story about a man with a broken upper leg (femur) that they set and he went back to work later the same day. Either you lived or you died.

It is rather amazing that of the 500-man Battalion, only 21 of the men died during their year of enlistment. That is less than a 5% mortality rate among the Mormon Battalion. Among the rest of the Mexican War Army volunteers, a 10% to 15% death rate was typical according to references I've seen. Peter and I work our way down canyon, past Vail Lake and along the old stage route into Temecula. The rain is moving in from the coast, completely surrounding us. Happily, we escape with only light sprinkles.

The Vail Ranch Headquarters Museum at Redhawk Parkway and Wolf Store Road is our stopping location for the day. This was the old headquarters of the historic Vail Ranch established back in the 1880's by Walter Vail. Rebecca Farnbach is president of their preservation committee who is hosting the activities this weekend. We are treated to a get-together with the Committee and enjoy a dinner at the Museum. There's a beautifully restored Concord stagecoach and a host of other frontier and early American period artifacts. They have an active "living history" program as well as the school and Scout tour with activities. Nice folks.

If you can't get to Temecula, you can visit the Vail Ranch Restoration Association website at:

<http://varra.hypermart.net/>

After our long day, we retire to the home of John and Susan Billings who are letting us set up "home base" in their yard. They're very helpful and Susan is the LDS Church's PR lead for the area. She's felt drawn to the Battalion story since they moved here about 18 months ago. We have lots to talk about, her and I – but not tonight. We're pooped and it's going to be a long day tomorrow.

[Saturday, January 24 – Temecula, CA](#)

Up early, we hustle down to the Vail Ranch Museum to set up a period camp. Outside we put up two tents, set up Denny's laundress equipment and prepare to receive the public.

As we've not had much opportunity to be on the internet, I have to take some time to update the Google Earth file, transfer some photos and prepare for tonight's presentation.

Rebecca Ford stops by. Rebecca prepared a study of the Battalion's passage through the Temecua valley. It was part of her Bachelor's degree work back in 1997. I'd heard about it and it was on my list of things to find (eventually). To my astonishment, Ms. Ford presents me an autographed copy. Rebecca also explains gently why I have to write a book about the Trek and the trail. Dang! She's right - I will have to write a book. Why are women so able to explain such things to us dolt-headed men?

In the evening, folks start arriving for the presentation. Rebecca Farnbach introduces Dr. Anne Miller who prefaces with an explanation of who the Battalion was, why they were on the march, their accomplishments and importance to local and national history.

Using the Google Earth virtual trail we've developed, we attempt to put "place" and "event" into a visual context. I really enjoy the opportunity to share stories while showing WHERE they happened. Frequently the "place" has a strong influence on "what" happens. Terrain is the "opposition" for so much of the Battalion's story. Think about it this way: Box Canyon is important BECAUSE they were between a rock and a hard place. Without the challenge, there wouldn't be a story there. Their suffering in the waterless deserts becomes a story because the geologic terrain doesn't trap water.

The reproduction military backpack issued to Battalion members is another aspect I like to share. The pack's small size precluded the men from taking very much; a few personal items, perhaps some extra clothes and a journal, but not much else. Until you SEE the pack, you really can't comprehend just how limited the mens' existence was.

Members of the Perchanga tribal council are present and we are introduced. Sometime in the future, I want to return and listen to their stories about the Battalion's arrival. One tribal member's ancestor joined the Mormon religion and I'm interested in getting that story too. It's another example of the kind of things we're interested in documenting.

After it's all over and we've put away our equipment, Rebecca Farnbach tells us that over 350 people visited the Museum today. She seems quite pleased with the cooperative event. I know we certainly are and happy to have been helpful to their effort in saving their history.

[Sunday, January 25 – Temecula, CA](#)

It's one of those Sundays that gives us a chance to recuperate. Slow morning. No evening events planned. Restful.

When I took my "drive through" exploration trip in '07, I stopped at Temecula and fell in love with the town and its people. The Battalion has an interesting story here. They nearly got into a fight with the local tribe and found out at the last minute they were actually "friendly" towards each other. Though they stayed only one night, the encounter seemed to be a positive one for both groups.

In the LDS chapel on CA-70, there's a painting of the Battalion's men meeting members of the local Perchanga tribe. Ashley Hyllested painted it back in the 1990's. I love that picture and will post a photo of it with our Virtual Trail project.

Sadly, in my haste to get to church, we didn't realize the Billings attended a different congregation, so we ditched our hosts for church meetings. Sorry 'bout that Susan.

In the evening, the weather has turned decidedly COLD with a strong north wind. The Billings have prepared an outdoor cookout dinner (is that redundant?). We're all bundled up with a fire going to keep us warm. It's odd to be in southern California and experiencing this.

Our final days on the trail into San Diego start tomorrow. We can't believe we're so close. The original Battalion had to be excited too.

[Monday, January 26 – San Luis Rey River valley](#)

As we arise, we can see San Jacinto Peak (10,839 feet) and Hot Springs Mountain (6,533 feet) are topped with snow, just like they were in 1847 as the Battalion passed through the area. We're glad we didn't have to sleep out in the rain the past couple of nights.

The Billings home will still be our base of operations for today and tomorrow. We grab breakfast, get dressed for hiking, then Peter and I are driven back to the Vail Ranch Museum. The blog hasn't done justice to the reception by the folks here. Hopefully the book will have enough room to do so.

The old route out of Temecula heads up into Rainbow Canyon – named for James P Rainbow in 1879 according to "San Diego County Place Names A to Z" by Leland Fetzer. I'd anticipated a more romantic origin. This little book will be important to anyone wanting to puzzle out places along the San Diego County section of the trail. I highly recommend browsing it online at Google Books – especially the Introduction which is highly informative about naming conventions and practices. Wonderful source.

After an hour or so of hiking, Denny, Peter and I reach a milestone. The "Entering San Diego County" sign stops us short for a photo session as we near our long anticipated goal. The sign is just a confirmation of how close we are and adds a noticeable spring to our step all day. The sun is warm, the breezes are cool and despite the busy roads, we're pushing forward, eager to reach San Diego itself.

Terry Wirth has done some research into the Pala Canyon area. Apparently a major part of el Camino Real went through that way. It's one of the unresolved aspects to the trail. Hopefully Terry can find some additional reference resources that will help us figure it out.

On our way back to Temecula, we stop at a farm produce store for some food and Craig Smedley finds us! How we manage to bump into each other is beyond me. Completely unplanned. How does that happen? Craig, you may remember, hiked with us in the Vallicito to Box Canyon area last week. Craig is a descendant Levi McCullough, Pvt Co C.

We make dinner for the Billings family – stew with cornbread and peach cobbler. Ok – Denny makes dinner while we work on gear and packing. They’ve been wonderful to us all week long. Thanks.

[Tuesday, January 27 – Carlsbad, CA](#)

Jerry drives today so we can all hike. It’s much more enjoyable. The route follows CA-76 and the San Luis River down canyon towards the Mission. While there are homes, businesses and farms all along the river, we are excited to see some friends; lots of very large hawks; fifteen of them today and of all things, a coyote loping along.

There’s a horse riding stable in the area and a horse trail has been cut near the river. I decide to hike a section. The river bottoms are full of cane grass and the wild assortment of southern California exotic species that didn’t exist here in 1847. We’re too busy to followup on so many details. Maybe someday someone else will scour the available research about plant species the Battalion would have encountered. They do mention “oats” and some other plants, but not many. The Spanish archives will probably be a gold-mine of information about these things if someone bothers to go research them.

The road crosses the river to the south side and into town – San Luis Rey. Off to our right, the whitewashed walls and red roofed restored Mission beckons as do the barracks ruins. But, like the Battalion, we hurry on past, intent on reaching our goal in San Diego. We will stop by late next week on our way up to Los Angeles.

Another half-mile westward, we turn left onto historic el Camino Real, “the Road Royal”, the “King’s Road.” Padres, natives, soldiers, traders, women, children, donkeys, wagons ... I see them all in my mind’s eye and imagine I can hear them as we go south and start up the first big hill of el Camino Real. It’s the last historic road we will tie into and it completed the Battalion’s task of connecting the east with the southern west coast.

Then, off to our right, peeking through the “V” shaped notch formed by the valley walls, we catch the first glimpse of the Pacific Ocean. We’re here earlier in the day than the Battalion was, so the sun doesn’t glint off the water for us. It’s a little harder to see through the smog, but still, the blue-gray visually filling the notch to the horizon line is clearly the ocean. We pause to remember their wonderment, then press on.

If you want to see the view – poor resolution though – go to Google Maps and paste the following intersection:

S El Camino Real & Vista Oceana, Oceanside, CA 92054

Once there, click under the small photo to activate the “Street view.” Rotate the view to look west and that’s pretty close to where the Battalion first spied the ocean. Doesn’t look anything like the July 2007 Ensign cover does it?

We proceed south, passing Cannon Road near the sulphur springs that gave Agua Hedionda stream its name. According to Fetzer (see yesterday’s post), when the Mexican government granted Juan Maria

Marron a land grant in 1842, Marron preferred the name Rancho San Francisco over “stinking water ranch”. At almost each stream we can look westward to glimpse the ocean. The marshes have been heavily modified, filled, dredged and diked against the ocean waves. Still, one can get a glimpse of what the coast line may have looked like; green salt grasses, the tidal flats and estuaries all warmed under the January blue skies and cooled by gentle sea breezes.

Peter’s wife, Virginia, drives in from northern California. They haven’t seen each other since December 17 back near Tucson Arizona. Military families and missionary families share such events in common. It is another connection to the original Battalion enacted before our eyes – husband and wife reunited after a long absence. Surely it’s a glimpse at reunions on the other side of the veil.

We end the day just east of Palomar Airport, then hustle back to Temecula. Susan Billings has asked to get a Mormon Battalion primer of what we’ve learned along the route and the unit’s history. We finish up about 10:30 PM and have a wonderful evening of friendship.

[Wednesday, January 28 – Soledad Valley, CA](#)

Morning is busy. It’s time to take a final leave of the Billings who have been so kind to us. We wish them well with their family but expect to see them all this Saturday at the big event. Jerry helps pack us and then he moves the RV trailer to San Diego’s Boy Scout Camp Balboa, near the zoo.

The Imperial Scout Council is letting us use the camp as our base for the week. Since my Scout group in Michigan started this whole interest in the Battalion, it seems appropriate. In fact, we’ve been closely associated with the Scouts along the entire route. The majority of those who have hiked along with us have been under Scout auspices – troops and Cub dens joined us for a day here and there.

Terry Wirth and Virginia Guilbert join in the hiking for today, bringing us to a respectable group of five hikers. We all share in driving the Suburban as necessary. Well, that was after we had a little confusion. Seems Jerry didn’t get all the keys and is locked out of the RV, so Denny and Virginia scoot down to Balboa to get him installed.

Peter, Terry and I take the old el Camino Real side roads that Terry has scoped out during the past year. Our route winds through housing developments and along horse trails. At one stream, Terry relates that there used to be two crossings; one for wagons, another for people on foot. The foot path was in the softer marshlands that couldn’t support wagons. Which one the Battalion men used is uncertain. Now, considering the importance of el Camino Real to early California history, you’d think there would be well researched maps showing the ROUTE of the trail. Apparently, not so – or at least – none one can easily get their hands on. Believe me, I’ve tried.

I know. I know. The California State Legislature has ruled that Highway 101 is nearly the exact route of the old trail, but you and I know that isn’t likely to be EXATCLY true. An old trail would have more variability than a modern road. So, it’s kind of annoying and with a small degree of paranoia when I try to find more details about el Camino. Very frustrating since you know SOMEWHERE there’s a map that

tells more accurately where the original route was located. Enough of my ranting, but finding the old route is what our hike has been about and old maps are key to the effort.

Our stopping point is about twelve miles out from San Diego – under the intersection of I-5 and I-805. The original Battalion camped about 20 miles out but we don't want to hike that far and arrive in the dark tomorrow. We take Terry back to his house in Carlsbad. Peter and Virginia bail with their car leaving just Denny and I to drive back to Balboa, get dinner with Jerry and retire early. Tomorrow has been long in coming and I'm anticipating this very much.

Thursday, January 29 – San Diego, CA

It is almost unbelievable to us that we are to arrive at San Diego today.

We arise early (probably due to excitement), grab an easy breakfast, then pile into the Suburban and drive back to the intersection of I-5 and I-805. Peter and Virginia Guilbert, Bob Tingey, Denny, Jerry and I make up the group as we start. We don't hike the interstates, of course, but the original route is so closely aligned with the modern highways that we have to work at finding a route we can hike. There's only thirteen miles remaining for us into San Diego.

Terry Wirth has previously scouted the area for us, finding an open dirt road leading from Soledad Valley up onto the mesa so we can follow local roadways. It's a good route, leading us past the LDS San Diego Temple at the four mile mark.

Jerry and Virginia drive ahead to the temple in hopes of arranging access to the grounds for some photos. This week the temple is closed for cleaning. Not to be deterred and using her womanly charms (although I suspect there's an outside possibility she may have also threatened a lawsuit), Virginia manages to strike a deal with the guard for us to spend a few minutes at the entrance gate area.

In a way, it seems symbolic that the temple site sits almost astride the original Battalion's route. In fact, we've noted that a number of LDS buildings along our route are very close to the trail. Makes one wonder if that's a purposeful choice when property is purchased.

As we finish the morning section at nine miles, some of the Sierra-Nevada Mormon Pioneer reenactors arrive to hike the last section with us into Old Town. Jerry Gardner, Smokey Bassett and Jonathan Taylor join in the fun. They get into their period correct (PC) gear and soon we're off for our last five miles. Their website is at: <http://1846history.com/>

Jon specializes in singing "The Girl I Left Behind Me" – adding a nice touch as we tramp along since we don't have fifes or drums. Our time is spent getting to know each other. Bob Tingey's 26-star US flag leads the way and Bob shares the opportunity to carry the colors.

Virginia Guilbert points out that back in 1847 the women would not have been permitted to carry the flag – that, "It's not PC" (period correct). Virginia is right, but we're not attempting to make an accurate portrayal in every 1846-47 detail. Our goals include the opportunity for the women's voices to be heard in ways that they weren't in 1847. In today's Army, women DO carry the colors and do many other

things that were previously limited to just the men. Society has changed in many ways – some good, some not so, but overall, we live in a world of nearly unlimited opportunities compared to those who went before us.

Parading down Moreno Boulevard with the colors flying brings honks from passing cars. San Diego is still a town with deep military roots. The Spanish Presidio was here. The US Navy and Marines are major influences today and there are many DOD suppliers, so we're happy to wave back at folks as they support us along our route.

Approaching Old Town, we can plainly see in front of us the hill upon which the Spanish colonial presidio was built. It's there that Company B was quartered from mid-March through mid-July of 1847. Our little group marches into Old Town State Park just before 4 PM. We parade around the plaza coming to a halt at the State Park Information Center. Over the next half hour, we answer questions from some of the tourists, take our photos and bask in our individual feelings.

People ask if I'm elated, nostalgic or sad it's over. Mostly I'm peaceful – mellow. There's an element of satisfaction – completion, at least for this part of the Trek. There's more ahead of us to accomplish, but for today, this is enough, quite enough.

It is almost unbelievable to us that we have arrived at San Diego today.

[Friday, January 30 – San Diego, CA](#)

Late last night, Mark Woodbury and some friends arrived from Saint George. They set up some tents here at Scout Camp Balboa. Me? I was zonked out in bed and didn't even know it until I got up this AM.

Tonight is the "big report" about the Trek. Descendants, historians, serious reenactors and other interested parties are expected this evening to hear about the Trek. Understandably, I'm skittish since I'm not really a researcher much less a historian. So, I'm busy putting together what I hope are some key points along our trail. Photos are culled through for some of the best. The Google Earth Virtual Trail is a major effort for today. I review what I want to present, then practice a few times.

At 2 PM, we gather some of the late arrivers for a "reenactment of the reenactment." We gather outside Old Town State Park and march into the Plaza again, giving more folks an opportunity to participate in the Trek's arrival.

Journalist Helen Read from the Seagull LDS newspaper came to interview some of the group. The Sierra-Nevada Mormon History group is old hat at this; we learned from their example of telling the Battalion's complex story in a succinct way. The women's story in particular is important to share since there were so few that arrived in California.

After the interviews and photos, we run back to the trailer, grab some dinner, collect our "stuff" and head off for the evenings seminar. The organizers invited us to highlight the evening's presentations. About 75 folks attend with some standing at the doors and back wall. The Google Earth Virtual Trail is populated with photos and I tell stories of the people and places we've been during the past seven

months. Someone should have stopped me after an hour and a half. There is just so much information I lost track and went long. Thanks to those who were patient.

Conclusions: We need a full-blown, two or three day seminar to bring together the various researchers. Clothing, equipment, trail, military leadership issues and so many other lines of research need to be shared. I tell the group that there is lots of “low hanging fruit” – topics that no one has approached yet but which would add to our understanding. We need to get busy and put something like this together. Gates at Balboa Scout Camp are locked at 10 PM, so we have to leave the seminar early. I am grateful for the opportunity to share some insights I’ve had.

[Saturday, January 31 – San Diego, CA](#)

We take the yellow Henski Truck down to Old Town San Diego State Park early in the morning. The fourteen LDS Stakes from around San Diego each provide a “hands-on” activity booth for this annual Battalion commemorative event. Thousands of folks will come to participate in the fun and hopefully learn a thing or two.

Richard and Eva Peterson take good care of us. They’re the coordinators for this large scale event and are terribly busy I suspect. We appreciate their kindnesses in giving us a good location on the plaza at Old Town San Diego State Park.

Dragging out all our period gear, we set a representative Battalion camp. The tents go up quickly. The laundress equipment and cooking gear is set out. Backpacks, blankets, muskets, books and all the accoutrements we’ve decided to use today are arranged. Then it’s show time.

At the northwest corner of Old Town the reenactors gather to parade onto the Plaza. There are about 30 serious reenactors supplemented by about 100 full-time LDS missionaries. With flags a-flying, drums a-beating and cannon a-booming, we parade around the Plaza then assemble for short commemorative speeches.

In 1847 the Battalion did not march en masse into Old Town. They camped up near the old Mission, about five miles up canyon. They were allowed to leave camp the next couple of days and a few recorded their impressions of this very small community by the bay.

The Henry D. Fitch store was in business in 1847 – the only store here. Henry Standage wrote, “No shoes to be had or much else.” Levi Hancock sketched the town and ships in the great natural harbor. Today, all sorts of vessels are anchored nearby including US Navy aircraft carriers.

All day long we field questions, talk about Battalion members, equipment and techniques. We invite people into the tents, to sit and wrap up in “Buffalo Bill” and hold the musket. This is much more familiar territory – just like the “River of Time” living history event back in Michigan.

Getting people to participate is key to getting people interested in history – their history – whether their actual or adopted history doesn’t matter much. It’s where we came from and how we got to where we are today – and it’s important to understanding today.

Everyone asks about “The Beard.” My face hasn’t seen a razor since July 5 and the seven month growth is ... substantial. In fact, Denny has avoided most facial contact for about four months or so. Can’t blame her. The hair hasn’t been trimmed either. I’ll be glad to be rid of it.

My only concession has been to snip the moustache a tad so it doesn’t get into my mouth. It’s just easier to trim it than to bite it off. Val Halford, one of the major reenactors from SLC, said I’d done reenactors a service by showing how big a beard gets in seven months. Easy research, eh?

Well, I’ve joked a few times about cutting “The Beard.” Starting at the Yuma presentation, I’ve jokingly said people were invited to San Diego to see me cut it off. And I made the half-hearted joke again this morning on the stage. “Y’all are invited to our camp at 3 PM to see me shave off ‘The Beard.’”

So, at 2:45, Denny reminds me I’d better be ready. There’s nobody hanging around our camp, but off I go to get some hot water from a nearby restaurant. When I return at 2:55 – there’s about SIXTY people standing around! YIKES! Put up or shut up time.

One minor consideration; I’ve NEVER used a straight razor before – Ever. I’m quite concerned this could be a blood bath! I even warn the crowd that if anyone’s queasy around blood they’d better sit down or not watch. So what happens? A mother plops her three really young kids directly down in front of me! Sheesh! I wonder if she’s hoping to use me as a “bad” example?

Anyway, long story short, I shave the right side of my face so people can see a “before and after” view of me with & without “The Beard.” Fuzzy left and smooth right side in one photo. Quite a difference.

Seeing the photos after the fact, I’m surprised at the comparison. No wonder the 1846 group wanted to keep their beards for their family to see. But, military regulations being what they were, Colonel Cooke appropriately ordered the men to “clean up” – Armyspeak for “shave and groom.” This they did the following week in San Luis Rey – not at San Diego. I’m jumping the gun slightly, I know.

After the photos, I finish the deed and have my face back. Yippee! Happily, the blood loss is minimal (double Yippee!). Seeing myself later in a mirror is a shock because my face is so much thinner. All too soon, 4 PM arrives and we break camp and it’s time to celebrate.

Denny’s arranged a big “pot luck” dinner at the Scout camp. We didn’t keep a very good count, but about 50 or so folks show for meal. We’re humbled by the contributions many of these folks have made to “our” success. Some are Trek board members. There are old friends, new friends, relatives and new people to meet. Some are local. Others have driven a thousand miles to be here today. We are so blessed by this.

The dutch ovens and stoves have been busy. Little groups form and reform as folks share stories about their ancestor and our experiences during the past year. There’s lots of food and we’re all well fed by the end of the evening. We clean up and folks head home. It’s been a great day.

After dark, a thick fog rolls in from the bay. Floodlights play through the fog and tree limbs giving an odd look to the place. As traffic on the 4-lane highway zooms in the background a coyote strolls through

camp making the night seem even more surreal. We're in San Diego. The Trek is almost done and that's the most surreal part the entire day.

After Action Report – Post Trek Follow-up

Jerry Watts - R.I.P. (5-25-2010)

We sadly announce the passing of Denny's father, Jerry Watts, this morning.

Jerry contracted pulmonary fibrosis shortly before the Trek and the past few months took a serious turn for the worse.

Denny was able to be home with her Dad and help him during the last couple weeks.

For those of you fortunate enough to have met Jerry, you understand how much he will be missed.

- Kevin